

# MIKE SHAYNE

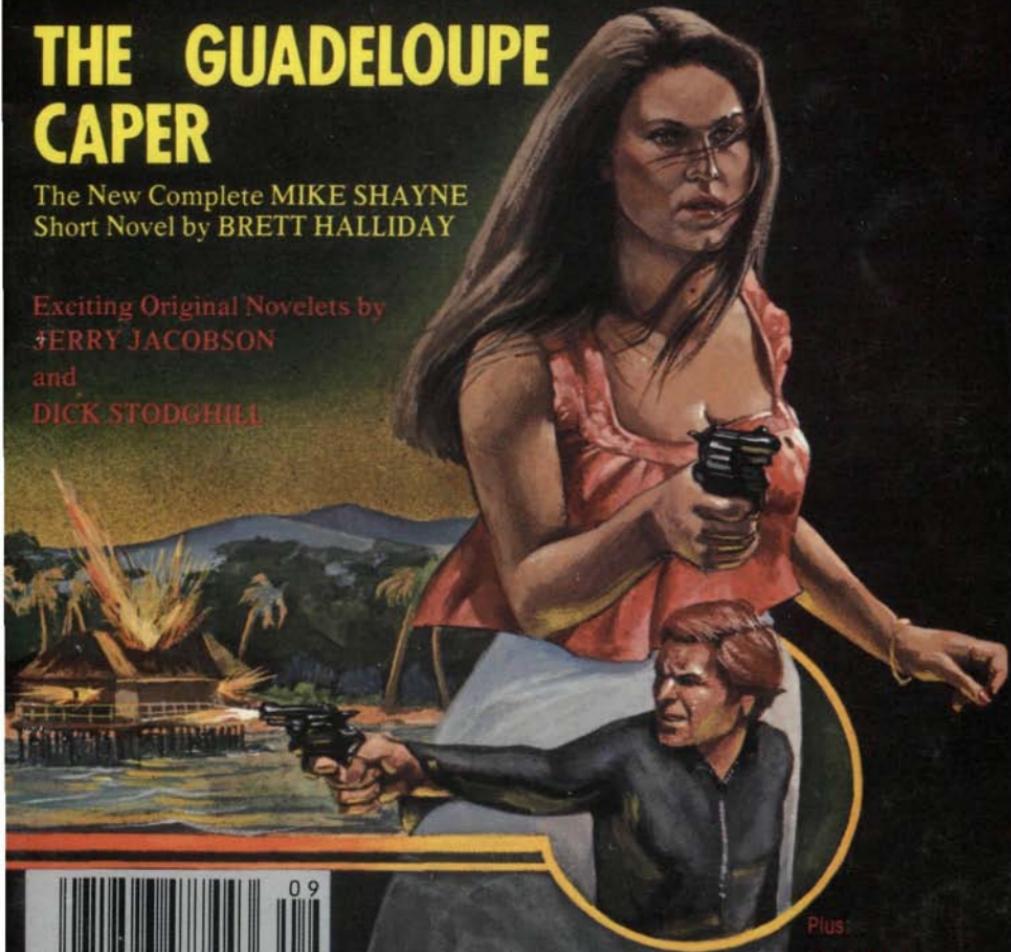
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# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JULY, 1979  
VOL. 43, NO. 7

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

### THE GUADELOUPE CAPER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

*It's a needle-in-a-haystack assignment. Shayne's job is to find two million dollars in missing securities, plus the couriers who were carrying them — if possible! .....* 4-43

### TWO EXCITING ORIGINAL NOVELETS

#### LEAVE IT TO A PRO

Dick Stodghill ..... 44

#### THE HOUSE IN DOWNEY

Jerry Jacobson ..... 85

### FIVE STUNNING NEW SHORT STORIES

#### TOUCH

Charles E. Fritch ..... 58

#### FINAL PAYOFF

Robert Turner ..... 66

#### AMBULANCE REPORT

Morgan Powell ..... 77

#### AMBUSH IN BANGKOK

Mike Taylor ..... 115

#### CRUISING

M.J. Shimmel ..... 124

### TWO SPECIAL FEATURES

#### STIFF COMPETITION

John Ball ..... 80

#### METHODS FOR MURDER

Larry T. Shaw ..... 128

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# The Guadeloupe Caper



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by BRETT HALLIDAY

## Two Million Dollars Missing in a West Indian Hotel Deal — Plus the Two Couriers Transporting the Money. It's Up to Shayne to Find the Loot and Return It — Also, the Couriers, if Possible.

IT WAS A January Monday morning and driving rain washed the windows of Mike Shayne's East Flagler Street office. Shayne had snapped on the transistor radio on his littered desk to listen to the weather report. The stationary cold front hovering over Florida promised to dump four or five inches more rain on Miami and Miami Beach during the next two days.

Lucy Hamilton, back at work after a hospital stay, was at her receptionist's desk outside the redhead's private office. He could hear the click of her electric typewriter as she typed the few letters he had just dictated.

"Lucy needs a complete change of scene," the doctor, Will Gentry Jr., had told the detective over dinner last night. "She went back to work too soon after leaving the hospital."

The surgeon son of Chief of Police Will Gentry had been called

in for consultation after a .22 caliber slug meant for Mike Shayne struck Lucy in the head. She had insisted on coming back to work two days after leaving the hospital. Lucy was pale, wan and suffering from splitting headaches.

"I diagnose the headaches as psychosomatic," the younger Gentry said. "She lost ten pounds she can't afford to lose in the hospital and isn't gaining them back. Get her away from the office, Mike."

"For how long?" Mike Shayne asked.

"As long as possible. Take her on a cruise. The sea change will do her a world of good."

Shayne thanked the young surgeon for his advice, said, "Getting Lucy Hamilton aboard a cruise ship will take a bit of doing."

Dr. Gentry grinned. "You'll manage."

A late-night telephone call resolved the problem.

The redhead stared out the rain-washed windows of his office and mentally computed 10% of two million dollars before he said, "Lucy, can you come in here for a minute?"

Lucy Hamilton's typing stopped. "Can't it wait until I finish this letter, Michael?" she asked in a cross voice. He heard her get up and go to the water cooler, then the rattle of pills. "You said you wanted it mailed this morning," Lucy complained.

"Oh, hell!" Lucy was framed in the doorway to Shayne's office, a bottle of aspirin in one hand, a half-full glass of water in the other. "What is it?"

Her frown and the pained expression on her face caused the detective a twinge of guilt. He shouldn't have let her come back to work so soon. "How many aspirin is that since we had breakfast?" Mike asked.

"That's none of your business," Lucy snapped. "Dr. Gentry told me to take as many as I need."

"Dr. Gentry told me last night you need to get away from the office for awhile."

"He has no business discussing me with you!" Lucy flared.

Mike Shayne grinned. "How would you like it if we took a cruise?"

Lucy's hand jumped to her forehead as if to rub away the frown.

"One with a cruise director, shuffleboard, dancing in the main salon? You'd hate it as much as I would. We'd be bored out of our minds. Is this one of Dr. Gentry's ideas?"

"He suggested it," Shayne said. "Sit down." He came around his desk and motioned Lucy into the comfortable leather chair facing it. Standing behind Lucy he began to massage her shoulders and neck. "What I have in mind . . ."

Lucy didn't let him finish. "Every single girl or woman aboard would try to have a shipboard romance with you. Hey, that feels good!"

"Beats aspirin," he told her.

"We'd have to sit at the captain's table at least once," Lucy went on, "and listen to his stories of life at sea."

"Are you going to stop talking?" Shayne asked.

Lucy twisted her head and sighed with relief. "So long as you keep doing what you're doing," she promised.

"I've chartered the *Blue Dawn* from Pete Foley, and he's getting her ready to sail," he said. "We're starting from Key West in the morning for Dominica and then Guadeloupe."

"Oh?" Lucy was interested. "Did you just inherit from a rich uncle? Chartering Pete's boat costs money and you know the state of our bank account these days."

"Shut up and listen," the red-head growled. He stopped massaging Lucy's neck and shoulders and slumped into his desk chair. "Florida Mutual Casualty Company is paying for the charter and our expenses. Oscar Metzendorf, in charge of their claims department, called me at my apartment last night."

"How did he get your unlisted number?" Lucy wanted to know.

"Oscar put through one of those operator calls — 'Do you want to speak with this person, Mr. Shayne?' I returned his call at his home."

"What does he want us to do?" Lucy asked.

"Locate two million in negotiable securities," Mike Shayne said. "Two messengers disappeared with the securities while taking them to Guadeloupe for hand delivery to Bertram Conrad, the hotel magnate. It seems he's buying an island off the coast of Guadeloupe, and the two million securities was to be earnest money in the deal. Florida Mutual insured the securities' safe delivery."

"Who were the messengers?" Lucy asked.

"Wayne Adams, a junior vice president at Miami Trust & Savings, and Allen Metzendorf, Oscar's son."

Lucy whistled softly. "Both men are probably in Brazil right now, splitting the loot," she said.

"Oscar doesn't think so," the detective told her. "He's keeping the file open until we complete our investigation."

"Why doesn't he think so?" Lucy asked.

"He's going to tell me over lunch at the Miami Athletic Club this noon," Shayne said. "Forget that letter — it will keep. Take the rest of the day to shop or whatever and I'll meet you at your apartment for supper. Then we'll drive down to Key West for an early start tomorrow morning."

Lucy got up. "My headache's gone," she said, surprised.

The detective smiled. "That's good."

"Steaks for supper?" Lucy asked.

"No. We're having a catered affair."

"Catered?" Lucy was puzzled.

"Our friend Jose Cardenallo, the chef at *Bit-of-Havana*, is doing the honors. Monday is his day off because the restaurant is closed."

Lucy raised her eyebrows.

"By the way," he said, "charge a ten-speed bicycle at the *Miami Sport Shop* and have them deliver it to Jose Jr. His father wanted to make tonight a freebie because we got those Cuban hatchetmen off his tail last year. We settled for the boy's bike."

"Do you know something, Michael?" Lucy asked.

"What do you have in mind?"

"You continue to amaze me."

Shayne came around his desk to

lift her from the chair for a kiss. "That's good?" he asked.

"That's good," she told him, smoothing her hair.

## II

WHEN SHAYNE arrived at the quiet Leather Bar off the main dining room of the Miami Athletic Club, Oscar Metzendorf was waiting for him. The distinguished looking man in his late forties was dressed in a three-piece tailored charcoal suit that flattered his thickening body.

In a checkered sports coat fitted so the .45 Colt automatic under his left arm wouldn't be obvious, and slacks that could do with a pressing, the detective felt out of place.

The men shook hands. "You're a big one," Metzendorf commented. "Will you join me for a very dry martini before we take the table Frank has reserved for us?"

"Thanks. I think I will," Mike said. Then he changed his mind. "I'd rather go with Martell on the rocks."

"Of course." Metzendorf beckoned the bartender. "Another martini for me, Eddie, and Martell brandy on the rocks for Mr. Shayne." He finished the martini he had been sipping when Mike Shayne had arrived and set the stemmed glass back on the bar. "I've wanted to meet you, Shayne. Thanks for returning my call last night."

The redhead shrugged his wide shoulders. "Returning emergency calls is part of my business," he said.

"I suppose it is."

The bartender served their drinks. "You the detective?" he asked Shayne.

"Guilty."

Eddie reached across the bar to shake the detective's hand. "I got a boy with muscular dystrophy, Mr. Shayne," he said. "What you been doing for crippled children is a fine thing." He turned to Metzendorf. "Some people just give money, but not Mr. Shayne here. He goes along for outings with them."

"Is that so?" Metzendorf was impressed.

"It sure is," Eddie said. "Eddie Jr. come back from the last one talking about Mr. Shayne and he hasn't stopped yet."

Shayne was blushing and uncomfortably shifting his feet. He downed his brandy in a gulp. "You've got a fine kid," he told Eddie.

Eddie refilled his glass. "On the house, Mr. Shayne."

Eddie moved on up the bar to serve another customer.

"I see you're a man of many parts, Mr. Shayne," Metzendorf said. "Shall we have our lunch and talk about the reason my company needs your services?"

Shayne nodded. "Let's do that."

The club's head waiter had reserved a secluded corner table for the two men overlooking the rain-drenched tennis courts. "This sort of weather isn't good for Florida's tourism," Metzendorf observed while they studied the large menus. "Do you play tennis, Mr. Shayne?"

"Not well," Shayne said.

Metzendorf sized him up. "Football would be your game."

"It was," the detective admitted.

The waiter came to take their order.

Metzendorf ordered the chef's salad. "Have to watch the waistline," he confessed.

"I'll have the prime ribs, rare," Shayne told the waiter. "Also the baked potato with plenty of sweet butter."

When the waiter had taken their menus, he said, "Last night you told me there's reason to think your son and Adams haven't absconded with Bertram's Conrad's securities. Maybe you'd like to explain."

"My son Allen is twenty-six, married to a fine girl and has two lovely children," Metzendorf said. "I've known him all his life and have never seen him do a dishonest thing. He's in the actuarial department of our company and accompanied Adams at my request."

"I see," Shayne said. "What about Adams?"

"Wayne Adams is thirty-eight. He's a comer over there at Miami Trust."

"Is he married?"

"Not at present. He was divorced some years ago and hasn't remarried."

"Children?"

"To the best of my knowledge, no," Metzendorf told him. "Wayne Adams isn't an absconder, Mr. Shayne. I'll swear to that."

"All right. Why did Conrad want the securities hand-delivered? There are safer ways."

Metzendorf's was a wry smile. "You'd have to know Bertram Conrad to understand, Mr. Shayne. He likes to do business with a flourish. We carry most of his risks at Mutual. This hand-delivery thing has happened before and that's why my son accompanied Adams."

"We have an agreement with Conrad Hotel Corporation and Miami Trust that someone from our company accompany their messenger when large amounts are to be carried to Bertram Conrad. There's never been any trouble before, so I arranged to have Allen go this time. He needed a short vacation and rest."

"When did all this happen? I'm not too clear on that."

"A week ago this Monday, my son and Adams boarded a Pan Am flight for Dominica. From there, they were to take a Carib Airlines plane to Guadeloupe. For some

reason, they cancelled reservations for that flight."

"Your company investigators have checked out this thing," Mike Shayne said. "What have they found?"

The waiter brought their orders. When he was gone Metzendorf said, "Nothing."

"Couldn't they have boarded some flight that would take them to Brazil?"

"The authorities on Dominica have checked that out," Metzendorf told him. "They didn't."

The redhead was thoughtful. "I take it your investigators haven't been down there?"

"No. That's why we're hiring you, Mr. Shayne. Finding missing persons is out of their line."

"Let's see," Shayne said. "Dominica is British, Guadeloupe is French. Here's what I plan to do, Mr. Metzendorf. I've chartered a small yacht, the *Blue Dawn*, and my assistant and I sail from Key West in the morning. As a yachtsman, I'll be more welcome on both islands than if I barge down there via Pan Am and Carib to throw my weight around. I mentioned this last night."

"Your methods, I understand, get results," Metzendorf. "I've made it clear to my company and Miami Trust that you have a free hand in the matter." From the breast pocket of his coat, he produced a certified check in the amount of \$5000. "That's for expenses and a retainer," Metzen-

dorf explained. "Will it be sufficient?"

Mike Shayne nodded as he tucked the check in his billfold. "You'll get an accounting," he promised, "but no progress reports. I don't work that way."

"Our lawyers are drawing up the recovery agreement," Metzendorf said. "It should be ready late this afternoon."

"Didn't we agree on 10% of the face value?" the detective asked.

"We did."

"Just mail it to my office address."

"But you'll have to sign it."

"I can do that if I come back with the paper," Shayne told him.

"If I don't your company can send me a check for another \$5000 and we're square."

"You have a strange way of doing business," Metzendorf said. "We could renege on our agreement unless it's signed and sealed before you leave."

The redhead shrugged. "With me holding two million in negotiable securities? I don't think you will."

"That is a point," Metzendorf admitted.

"Here's another to worry about. I might recover your securities and keep on going."

Metzendorf shuddered. "Now I hadn't thought of that."

"You don't move in the circles I do," Shayne said. "Be thankful for that. Actually, I like what I

do for a living too much to kick it over for two million. And I don't think the Brazilian climate would agree with me."

"Glad to hear it," Metzendorf said.

"Do you have the information I asked for last night?"

From an inside breast pocket Metzendorf took a bulky manila envelope and handed it across the table. "A listing of all the securities is there," he said. "Also copies of my son's personnel record from our company and Wayne Adams' from Miami Trust, plus pictures of both men."

Mike Shayne pocketed the envelope.

"Would you care for dessert?" Metzendorf asked.

"I don't think so. I have a couple of things to attend to this afternoon." The detective got up from the table and extended his hand. "Here's to luck."

Metzendorf stood up to take his hand. "My son's wife will feel better tonight when I tell her you're on the case, Mr. Shayne. The poor girl is nearly frantic from worry about what may have happened to Allen."

"Don't let her hopes go too high," Shayne warned. "Two million dollars is a lot of motive for foul play."

Metzendorf flinched. "I don't like to let myself think that is what's happened."

"I don't either."

Shayne avoided the bar and Eddie when he left the athletic club to find his Buick Special sedan in the club's parking lot.

He had intended to drive directly to his office, but instead drove to police headquarters to get a report on Allen Metzendorf and Wayne Adams from R.&I. Chief Will Gentry was on vacation but the sergeant in R&I was an old Shayne friend.

"Where've you been lately?" Sergeant Kirby asked him.

"Around," Shayne said. "Business has been slow. Do you suppose you could pull the rap sheets for an Allen Metzendorf and a Wayne Adams for me?"

"Also known as?" Kirby asked.

"They have no aka I know about," the detective said.

### III

THERE WAS NO yellow sheet for Metzendorf, but to the redhead's surprise there was one for Wayne Adams. He had been arrested as a juvenile for stealing a car, then two years ago had two arrests for drunken driving. He had paid a fine for the first DWI but the second charge had been dropped.

The officer who had made the second arrest, Mike knew, was no longer with the department. Chief Gentry's Internal Affairs division had recommended his dismissal. No charges had been filed against him, however, and

Gentry had allowed him to resign.

Mike Shayne concluded that Wayne Adams had reached Officer Whalen with enough money to change his mind about the DWI.

It took Kirby a while, but he finally found the arrest report on the DWIs. The suspect had stated to both arresting officers that he was disconsolate about being divorced from his wife.

"Thanks, Kirby," Shayne said, turning back the rap sheet and arrest reports.

"You onto a good one?" Kirby asked.

"Nothing I'm on is ever very good, Kirby. Did your youngster make the football team at his high school this year?"

"Sure did. Started every game this past season. Them pointers you gave him must have done the trick."

"Don't you believe it. Sam had what it takes. One Saturday afternoon in August couldn't make the difference if the kid wasn't a quick learner and had the desire."

"Do you think he could get an athletic scholarship to some university or college?" Kirby asked. "On a cop's pay, you can't buy much higher education."

"There's always a chance. Off the record, and between you and me, why did Floyd Whalen resign?"

"The cop who dropped on this Adams for the second DWI?" Kirby asked.

Mike Shayne nodded.

Kirby rubbed his thumb against his forefinger. "That ain't official," he said, "but the word gets around. Gentry's going to have a squeaky clean police department if he has to fire us all and start over again."

"You're right about that," the redhead told Kirby. "Tell Sam to stay in shape during the off season."

From police headquarters, he drove to his office on East Flagler. Here, he studied the personnel records Oscar Metzendorf had Xeroxed for him.

Allen Metzendorf was a graduate of the University of Alabama with a *Summa Cum Laude* degree in mathematics. From the university, he had come directly to the actuarial department of the Florida Mutual Casualty Company. Regular annual salary increases had raised his income to \$30,000 a year. His supervisor rated his work excellent.

Shayne tucked the men's pictures in his billfold and filed the copies of the personnel reports after scanning the one for Wayne Adams. That one was too sketchy to be of any interest except for a series of loans made and repaid since the time of his first DWI arrest.

There were six loans, each for \$1000. Alimony? There was no way of telling, but it was interesting information. Wayne Adams' salary should be substantial, but

it didn't show on the personnel record Miami Trust had released to Oscar Metzendorf. Shayne knew how touchy banks were about salaries paid their officers.

Shayne caught his hands behind his neck and stared up at the ceiling. From his study of criminology, he knew the profile of the average embezzler was that of a man or woman respected in his or her community. Almost invariably the suspect would hold a responsible position in the organization swindled and, like Caesar's wife, be beyond suspicion.

The embezzler, according to some authorities, was almost invariably a psychopathic personality, that is a completely self-centered person with no deep feeling of affection for anyone but himself or herself. Yet the type of person everyone liked.

Embezzlers, even when trapped, are very seldom killers. Stealing is a game with them and they know the consequences. The detective knew from long experience the inherent danger of jumping to quick conclusions, of investigating with a closed mind but, if he had had to place a bet at this point, his money would have gone down on Wayne Adams.

Shayne was ready to lock up and leave for Lucy Hamilton's apartment when the phone on his desk rang. He picked it up. "Shayne here."

"Pete Foley, Mike."

"Everything set for tomorrow

morning?" Mike asked.

"No. That's why I'm calling. I've been having a little problem with the *Blue Dawn*'s port diesel. Nothing serious, but the manufacturer is flying down the part I need. I won't be ready to sail until tomorrow night. And there's another thing."

The redhead sighed. "What's that?"

"Remember the Cubano kid who was my crewman the last time we took you, Gentry and Lucy out fishing?"

"I remember him."

"Well, he remembers you," Pete said, chuckling. "Me, you and Will blasted those would-be hijackers out of the water with anti-tank guns I borrowed from the National Guard. The kid has quit me. Did it as soon as he found out you'd chartered my boat."

"Doesn't he like our style of naval warfare?" Mike Shayne asked.

"No way," Pete said. "Can't say I blame him too much."

"Tell you what. Lucy doesn't know it yet but she'll make a fine deckhand. A plus for women's lib, Pete."

"Sure. Suits me," Pete said. "That one is a game little dame. She has to be working for you. Is she all right now after that shot in the head?"

"She needs a sea change," the redhead told him. "That's one reason for this West Indies cruise."

"So we make her our deck-hand," Pete said. "Great! You're all heart, Shayne."

"Thank you, Pete. Get that engine put together by tomorrow night if you can remember where all the parts go."

Mike Shayne reached Lucy's apartment at six o'clock and found her in a hostess gown, just lighting candles on the table she'd set up in the living room. There was a fire in the fireplace. From the refrigerator she took a frosted cocktail shaker.

"Brandy Alexanders," she explained, "made with Martell."

"Hey! We go first class tonight." He held her arms a moment to study her face. "No more headache?"

"My head's clear as a bell," Lucy said. "The laying on of hands this morning evidently did the trick. You should rent yourself out as a faith healer."

He kissed the tip of her nose. "Pour. I've a mighty thirst."

"Jose called," she said, filling their frosted glasses. "He'll be here with supper at six-thirty."

"Did you get the bike?"

"Sure did," Lucy said. "You'll be sorry when you get the bill."

Jose Cardanello, before the Castro take-over in Cuba, had been Batista's personal chef. He'd escaped the Isle of Pines but hadn't been able to bring out his wife and family.

Learning that his wife had died,

Jose had remarried in Miami and, backed by Cuban refugee friends, had established the *Bit of Havana*. The fame of his *haute cuisine* had spread all over the country and his restaurant was rated as the best of its kind in nearly every tour guide.

Jose arrived with a white-coated busboy at six-thirty on the dot. He had brought their supper already prepared at his restaurant. To go with it he had also come with three bottles of Pommery brut.

"Senor Mike, Senorita Hamilton, you will make yourselves comfortable at the table please," Jose announced in his careful English. "I, Jose, will now seduce your appetites but do not ask about my recipes." He touched a finger to his forehead. "They are locked in here."

The first course was soused jumbo shrimp marinated in vinegar and served with a piquant sauce. Green turtle soup was the second course with crisp croutons that had been soaked in garlic butter. He and Lucy washed these down with a very smooth California white wine.

Jose's main course was what Lucy and Mike thought was leg of lamb but baked with a delicious sauce. Their chef for the evening didn't confide it was a goat, but both of them commented on the deliciously different taste of the meat. Iced hearts of celery, green and black olives, as well as fresh baby green onions, were served

with the meat course. As a wine Jose had selected an excellent domestic burgundy.

Dessert was baked Alaska prepared in Lucy's oven with an iced bottle of Pommery. Shayne had to loosen the belt of his slacks when Jose and the busboy were packing up to leave.

"Your meal satisfactory?" the chubby Cuban chef asked.

"Just the best I've ever had, Jose," Lucy told him.

"Ten on a ten-to-one scale," Mike Shayne said. "How do you say a thousand thanks in Spanish?"

"*Mille gracias.*" Jose bowed to Lucy and gave the detective an *abrazo*. "*Vaya con Dios, mis amigos.*"

When Jose and the boy were gone, Shayne told Lucy, "I have a little trouble getting used to these Latin man-to-man embraces."

"Not to worry," Lucy said, "unless the other man is wearing heels and pantie hose, but how does a man-to-woman embrace grab you?"

Mike Shayne grinned. "I thought you'd never ask!"

"Bring the champagne?" Lucy asked.

"Fresh bottle," he said.

#### IV

THERE WERE watching the light and shadow of the street lights on the ceiling of Lucy's bedroom and

listening to the sizzle of pouring rain.

"For an early start, isn't it about time for you to get up and go home?" Lucy asked Shayne.

He patted a yawn. "Change of plans," he said. "Pete has engine trouble. We don't sail until tomorrow evening."

"How was lunch with Oscar Metzendorf?"

"It was lunch," he said. "Prime rib for me, salad for him."

Lucy raised on an elbow. "I didn't ask for a menu."

"Oscar doesn't believe his son is dishonest. He gives Wayne Adams a clean bill of health, too."

"So what does he think might have happened?"

"Angel, that's for us to find out. Can you think of a good excuse for you to see Mrs. Allen Metzendorf tomorrow?"

"Avon is calling?"

"No good. Try again."

"What do you want to know from her?" Lucy asked.

"What she feels about her husband's disappearance and what she really thinks about him."

"I could ask for recent snapshots."

"I have a mug shot of Allen, but that isn't too bad an idea. As a matter of fact, it's good."

"Having a good idea once in awhile goes with my territory," Lucy told him.

"Also damned near getting your head shot off," Mike Shayne

said in a grim voice.

Lucy's palm covered his mouth. "Hush. How many bullet holes do you have?"

"I've forgotten."

"I've counted to seven," Lucy said.

He grinned. "My lucky number."

"This case shapes up to be non-violent, Michael. For a change, I like that. We should take on more missing persons cases. A lot of people go missing these days."

"Damned few carrying two million dollars!"

Lucy frowned. "That could cause complications. Michael, I had a call this morning from a little old lady named Mrs. Carstairs. She wasn't very coherent over the phone, but I was sure you wouldn't be interested in her Social Security problem."

"Did you refer her to the Social Security office?"

"Yes, but they couldn't help with her problem. I was in her neighborhood shopping, so I stopped in for a cup of tea with Mrs. Carstairs."

Shayne groaned. "Here it comes!" he muttered.

"The problem is her monthly check, Michael," Lucy went on as if she hadn't heard him. "Somebody keeps stealing it out of her mailbox."

"Tell her to have it sent to her bank," the detective said. "They do that these days."

"Mrs. Carstairs doesn't trust banks."

"So what am I supposed to do?" he growled.

"She suspects her neighbor, a Mrs. Broadmoor."

"Why doesn't she tell the police?" he asked.

"Mrs. Broadmoor is older than Mrs. Carstairs," Lucy said. "Besides, they're good friends."

He sighed. "You win as usual. Give me the address and I'll look into the situation tomorrow morning."

Lucy patted his bare shoulder. "You'll be a friend indeed to Mrs. Violet Carstairs, Michael."

He sighed. "Is there any champagne left?"

"Not in this bottle, but there's another in the fridge. It's only fair you should talk with Mrs. Carstairs and Mrs. Broadmoor. I'm stuck with interviewing Allen Metzendorf's wife. *Quid pro quo.*"

"Run that last past me again."

"This for that. An old Roman custom."

"Sure. Your *that* could move us closer to 10% of two million dollars, however, but my *this* is liable to get me in the middle of a hair-pull."

"You'll manage," Lucy said in an airy voice.

Carstairs vs. Broadmoor the next morning, after circumspect questioning of both ladies by the detective, bought him a lesson

in semantics from Ellen Broadmoor.

"You evidently do not know the difference between the word stealing and the word purloining, Mr. Shayne," Ellen Broadmoor lectured. "I have simply purloined dear Violet's social security checks to teach her a lesson in the economics of living as a widow on a fixed income. I have them all, uncashed of course."

"Postal inspectors might not agree with you," he protested.

"Pshaw! What do they know?" Ellen Broadmoor said. "I've simply saved dear Violet money she would have lost playing bingo these past few months."

Ellen Broadmoor turned over three checks in unopened brown envelopes to Shayne. "You'll have a word with dear Violet about gambling away her government pension, won't you?" she asked.

"Promise," he said with his fingers crossed.

"And you won't reveal where the checks have been?"

"I'll do my best not to," he promised.

At the nearest branch post office he enclosed the brown envelopes in a white one, addressed it to Mrs. Violet Carstairs and sent it registered mail. *Compliments of the Postal Service and Miss Lucy Hamilton* was the scrawled and unsigned note that accompanied the checks.

Then he went to his office to phone Pete Foley. "Do we go

tonight?" he asked.

"Be down here at seven-thirty and you can tell Lucy to relax," Pete told the detective. "I have us a deckhand."

At his office, Shayne browsed the mail while waiting for Lucy to report in after her morning interview with Mrs. Allen Metzendorf. Tim Rourke called from the *Miami Daily News*.

"Anything interesting coming down, Irish?" Tim asked. "I'm hard up for a feature."

"I'm closing up shop for a week or two," Shayne said. "Lucy and I are taking a Caribbean cruise for a rest."

"No kidding?" Tim was impressed. "She feeling all right these days?"

"She will be after a little rest," the redhead said. "Now you're on the line, would you check with your financial editor about Bertram Conrad and his hotel company? One thing I'd like to know is if they could be in any sort of financial bind. Can you do it and get back to me this afternoon?"

There was a pause on Tim's end of the line.

"You there?"

"Mike, what's up?" Tim asked. "It just came over the Associated Press wire. Conrad escaped assassination about an hour ago on one of those dinky West Indies islands, I forgot the name."

"His chauffeur was killed in the machine-gun attack on Conrad's car."

"Was that on Guadeloupe?"

"Right. That's the place. What are you holding out on me, friend?"

It was Shayne's turn to pause. What he didn't need was a Tim Rourke story about the missing securities even if his name wasn't mentioned.

"Mike?"

"Tim, how would you like to join Lucy and me for a short cruise?" he asked. "As my guest."

"My editor would have crying fits," Tim said. "I've taken my vacation this year."

"We sail from Key West tonight aboard Pete Foley's *Blue Dawn*."

"What time?"

"Seven-thirty."

"I'll be on the dock," Tim promised. "This better be good, Shayne."

"Have I ever let you down?"

V

LUCY LAID OUT half a dozen snapshots on Shayne's desk. "Claudelle Metzendorf is a charming woman," she reported. "She made coffee and we had a long talk. Her husband is a Little League coach, a very fond father and so far as I can tell Claudelle loves him very much. She's in a nervous state, and, of course, keeping from the kids that Daddy is missing but I'd say she's carrying the strain very well."

"His father told me that Allen needed a vacation," Shayne said. "Did his wife indicate why that might be?"

Lucy was thoughtful. "That explains the pills."

"What pills?"

"In their medicine cabinet. I sneaked a look while I was at their house. A doctor is prescribing a barbituate for sleeping."

"For Allen?"

Lucy nodded. "Claudelle is on the pill, and that's it for her as far as prescribed substances are concerned."

Mike Shayne grinned. "Nosey, aren't you?"

Lucy was unconcerned. "That's part of what we pay me for, isn't it?"

He nodded. "I guess you're right. By the way, Tim Rourke is coming along on our little junket."

"Oh, *Michael!*" Lucy's face fell. "Do we have to have your favorite newshound? Or don't you believe three's a crowd?"

"I had to ask him," The redhead explained. "He knows we're onto something regarding Bertram Conrad." He told Lucy about the AP dispatch. "I can't spill the story of the missing two million, Lucy, and the best way to keep Tim out of print is to have him under our wing."

"Under our feet you mean," Lucy said. "Not that I don't love Tim, and I know he's done us a thousand favors in years past."

"It can't be helped."

"I guess not." Lucy sighed. "I'm beginning to get a headache. I think your mentioning a machine gun started it. What do you suppose we're getting into, some kind of war?"

"The assassination attempt and the missing two million may not have any connection," he said. "It's too early and a waste of time to speculate."

"Just the same," Lucy said, "I think I'll take an aspirin. Womanly intuition tells me this isn't going to be much of a pleasure cruise."

He pointed to the rain still spattering the windows of his East Flagler Street office. "Come what may," he said, "we'll at least be out of this unadvertised Florida weather."

"What have you got against rain?" Lucy asked. "It makes the grass grow green."

"Go take that aspirin," he told her.

Lucy had gone to pick up a new swimsuit when Tim Rourke called. "I could have saved this until we were aboard tonight," he said, "but I thought you might be in some kind of hurry to have the scoop about Bertram and his chain of hotels."

"You thought right," Shayne said, reaching for a ballpoint and a pad.

"First of all, he has stockholders," Tim reported. "It's an unlisted stock with Bertram the

majority stockholder. He's divorced a few Hollywood screen queens, as you probably know, but presently is enjoying the bachelor life. Our financial editor thinks that other stockholders in the corporation are mostly oil-rich Arabs. They're buying everything that isn't nailed down these days."

"So I understand," the detective said. "What else do you have?"

"He's trying to buy an island off Guadeloupe."

"I know about that," the detective said.

"Did you know that 25% of Guadeloupe's population votes communist whenever they have an occasion to vote?"

"No, I didn't know that." He thought a moment, then said, "But it's a French possession and the French communist party is pretty strong, though they don't usually go down the Moscow line."

"It wasn't a machine-gun used in the assassination attempt," Tim said. "The AP follow-up on the flash claims an AK-47 and an M-16 were used."

"Interesting," Shayne told him. "What else?"

"Conrad was in deep financial trouble until just recently. The Arabs probably bailed him out. For now, that's all she wrote, Mike."

"It's something," Shayne said. "See you in Key West tonight?"

"Count on it," Tim said. "The assassination attempt plus your chartering the *Blue Dawn* for a cruise of the Caribbean was too much coincidence for my editor to overlook. I have his blessing, but I'd better be able to deliver more than weather reports."

"I've a hunch you will," Shayne said. "See you on the dock. Do you get seasick?"

"What a question!"

"Sorry. I just thought I'd ask."

"Sicker than a dog," Tim admitted, "but I'm loading up on seasick medicine. I'll be all right."

The detective drove Lucy down to Key West and parked his Buick in Pete Foley's garage before he took her out for a seafood supper before going aboard the *Blue Dawn*. She presented him with a white yachting cap and a blue flannel double-breasted jacket with brass buttons.

"You might as well look the part of a wealthy yachtsman, Michael," Lucy explained. "Sports-coat and slacks would blow your cover."

"What are you going to wear?" he asked.

Lucy smiled sweetly. "The briefest bikini I could find in Miami Beach."

"It must be pretty brief."

"It leaves just a little to the imagination," Lucy said. She held up her thumb and forefinger a half-inch apart. "This much."

"All that much?" He told her. "Shades of Queen Victoria, woman!"

"You'll love me in it," Lucy promised.

He was delighted to see Lucy becoming the woman he had known before she was hospitalized with the gunshot wound and she had evidently submerged her womanly intuition, determined to enjoy the cruise to Dominica and Guadeloupe.

"I'd like you in overalls," he told her. "Or nothing at all, come to that. Now I think we should check out of here before Pete sails off without us."

"Where's our sad-eyed friend Tim?" Lucy asked.

Mike Shayne glanced at his watch. "He said he'd be on the dock at seven-thirty and that's about fifteen minutes from now."

## VI

THE ENGINES of the 44-foot cruiser were ticking over when Lucy and Mike arrived at the *Blue Dawn*'s berth on the Key West waterfront and Tim Rourke was already on board.

"Come on. Let's get out of this rain," Pete called from the flying bridge. "It's fair weather fifty miles east of here."

When the *Blue Dawn*'s clipper bow pushed out into the sea beyond the harbor entrance Pete put her on a course for Roseau on Dominica. His deckhand was an

out-of-work turtle fisherman named Luigi, and at the last minute Pete had taken aboard a cook, Antonio Segura.

"Tony needed the work," Pete explained to Shayne, "and your cooking last time out gave me pause for thought." Tim was in his berth aft dosed with dramamine and Lucy was settling into the amidships cabin she and the redhead would share. "Do you mind telling me what this cruise is all about? Dominica and Guadeloupe are nice little islands but you and Lucy could find white sand beaches a lot closer."

Driving rain squalls were beating down the choppy sea but the *Blue Dawn* with the wind off her port quarter had begun to pitch and roll. He and Pete were on the bridge. "We're looking for two million in negotiable securities," Shayne said. "Right now that's all I can tell you, Pete."

"Sounds like a worthy project," Pete said. "It beats trying to find wrecked Spanish treasure galleons off the Florida Keys."

"You know most of the West Indian islands pretty well. What can you tell me about Dominica and Guadeloupe?" the detective asked.

Pete pursed his lips. "Well, of all the islands, Dominica is the wildest. The last of the Carib Indians are located there. It is rocky and mountainous with surf beating the few beaches you wouldn't believe. A tourist attrac-

tion it isn't, but me and my missus like the place. We stayed there for a week a couple of years ago."

"What about Guadeloupe?" Mike Shayne asked.

"It's actually two islands with a narrow channel between them," Pete told him. "From the air, it looks like a butterfly. *Point-a-Pitre* is one port and *Basse Terre* the other. That's the name of the westward island, too — *Basse Terre*. The eastward island is called *Grande Terre*.

"*Basse Terre* is really the top of the mountain range that sank into the sea to form the West Indian islands. *Soufriere*, the active volcano, is on *Basse Terre*. *Grand Terre* is relatively flat. What else do you want to know?"

"What about smaller islands?"

Pete ticked them off on his fingers. "*Marie Galante*, *Terre de Haute*, *Goat Island*, *Terre de Bas*. Oh yes, *Desirade*. I guess that's it."

"Which one do you think might be up for sale to a hotel man?" Shayne asked.

"So you've heard about that?" Pete said. "Bert Conrad is trying to close a deal for most of *Marie Galante*. It's a two-hour boatride from *Point-a-Pitre* to St. Louis on *Marie Galante*. The only other town on that island is St. Louis. Conrad wants to turn it into a tourist playground with a high-rise hotel."

"Where do you get your information?" the redhead asked

Pete, curious.

"Other skippers. There's very damned little that goes on in the West Indies I don't hear about from one skipper or another. We try to keep each other up to date."

"Did you hear about Conrad's car being machine-gunned?" Shayne asked.

"Sure. That would be the *Sect Rouge* I'd guess. They're a secret society on Guadeloupe who are dedicated to their islands for the islanders. Yankee go home — Frenchman, too." Pete checked his compass and moved the wheel a spoke to port. "Don't go messing with those boys and girls. They play for keeps."

The *Blue Dawn* sailed out from under the canopy of rainstorm clouds and plunged her bow into a moon-flooded sea. Shayne braced against the boat's movement and stared through the salt-rimmed windshield at the racing whitecaps.

"How would you drop out of sight on Guadeloupe?" he asked Pete.

"With two million?"

Mike Shayne nodded.

"Me, a stranger?" Pete asked.

Mike Shayne nodded again.

"Not possible unless I knew the right locals," Pete told him.

"What if you did?"

"Entirely possible then," Pete said. "The islanders are a close-mouthed lot."

The redhead slapped his should-

er. "Thanks Pete. You want me to spell you awhile?"

"No, thanks. Luigi, Antonio and I have the watches set up, so enjoy yourself. You or someone is paying for this charter."

"Someone," Shayne admitted. "Good night."

"Capitan, a ship ahead," Luigi called back from his lookout station on the forward deck. "No lights."

Pete Foley snapped on the *Blue Dawn*'s searchlight to pick up a small, rusty freighter about a quarter of a mile ahead of their boat, broadside to them and dead in the water.

Shayne had paused in the doorway to the bridge. "Smugglers?" he asked Pete.

Pete nodded with a grim expression on his face and swung the *Blue Dawn* onto a course that would give the freighter plenty of sea room.

"Most likely a Colombian ship loaded to the Plimsoll marks with pot and cocaine," Pete said. "Waiting for a pickup launch. They're a dime a dozen out here these days."

"Busy little ocean," Shayne commented and went back along the sidedeck to duck into the cabin and knock gently on the door of the stateroom he and Lucy would share this voyage. There was no answer. He opened the door and stepped in.

Lucy was sound asleep and breathing regularly. He slipped

out of his clothes without turning on the light . . .

It had been an uneventful but pleasant cruise when the rugged island of Dominica came in sight on the eastern horizon. When they weren't sunning on deck, Shayne, Tim and Lucy played endless rounds of gin rummy for matchsticks. After the first day, Tim had found his sea legs and put away his seasick medicine.

The detective had filled him in on their mission with the understanding Tim wouldn't cable a line to his editor until he had Shayne's permission.

"This one we sit on until it's all wrapped up, one way or another," he told him.

"Agreed," Tim said. "So maybe you can tell me how you expect to find these two guys carrying the loot."

"Good question. They cancelled out on Carib Airlines after flying down to Dominica on Pan Am. Yet my hunch is they reached Guadeloupe, because that's where all the action is." He told Tim about Pete's mention of the *Sect Rouge*. "Here we're going to find out how they reached Guadeloupe and, with luck, why they didn't pick up their Carib reservations."

"Sounds simple the way you put it," Tim said, "but how do we know they didn't cut out for Brazil from Dominica or somewhere else where United States

doesn't have an extradition treaty?"

Mike Shayne grinned. "You're going to work that angle for me."

Ashore at Roseau, the three of them checked into the Fort Young Hotel. This hotel, erected on the site of the stone fort that once defended the harbor, incorporated some of the ancient stone walls with embrasures from which British soldiers fired on their enemies.

At lunch in the hotel dining room, Shayne told Tim, "Check with the customs and passport office this afternoon. If they left Dominica for anywhere but Guadeloupe, they would have had to clear customs and show their passports."

"Why couldn't they have boarded a yacht and just sailed away?" Tim asked.

"Good point. Check with the harbormaster and get a list of every boat that sailed the day they flew in and two days thereafter," Mike said. "I don't think that's what happened. It would require collusion, and Metzendorf as well as Adams left in a hurry with the securities Bertram Conrad needed. Just the same, Tim, check it out."

"What are you and Lucy going to do?" Tim asked.

"Drive across the island to the airport at Marigot. Not continuing their flight via Carib Airlines to Guadeloupe may have a simple

explanation. Perhaps one or the other was afraid of the smaller aircraft. Along that line, Tim, find out if there's another way to reach Guadeloupe from here. Foley said something about a night boat that used to make the run."

"You're pretty well convinced, Michael, that Allen Metzendorf and Wayne Adams reached Guadeloupe," Lucy said. "Why?"

Shayne shrugged. "Would you believe a hunch?"

"No." Lucy made an impatient movement with her hands. "You're not and never have been a hunch player."

"The machine-gun, or rather the semi-automatic-rifle attack on Conrad convinces me the action is all down there unless the pair absconded with the two million," he told her.

"You don't consider that likely?" Lucy asked.

He shook his head. "One man taking off — Wayne Adams, for example — is believeable. Two men? Very doubtful. Which is exactly why Florida Mutual insisted two men make the trip."

While Tim Rourke made inquiries in Roseau, Mike Shayne and Lucy crossed the island to the airport outside the coast town of Marigot, arriving there late in the afternoon. The road climbed from the coast lowlands into the mountain spine of Dominica, climbing mountains and sliding

down the other side in a dizzying succession of turns, many of them hairpins. Unused to keeping to the left the redhead drove their rented Fiat slowly.

They passed Mount Diablotin, the highest point on Dominica.

"I'm getting drunk on scenery," Lucy said once.

Shayne had just cautiously negotiated a double hairpin turn, spraying gravel from the shoulder of the narrow road some 1,000 feet down a cliff when he had to turn-out for a truck bound for Roseau.

"Glad you're enjoying the ride," he told her. "My nervous system is about shot. We should have made like mountain goats and done this stretch of nightmare road on pogo sticks!"

## VII

"I'M TRYING to find out why a couple of my friends didn't fly Carib to Guadeloupe," Mike Shayne told the airport manager, a middle-aged Englishman named Brian Donald. "I'm talking about Allen Metzendorf and Wayne Adams from Miami. They flew in on Pan Am." He gave Donald the date. "Any help you give me will be appreciated."

Donald brushed at his thinning white hair. "Curious you should ask just this afternoon," he said.

Shayne and Lucy exchanged glances.

"Their conduct was quite puzzling to me and the Carib people,"

Donald went on. "It happens one of our Carib pilots saw them conversing with a taxi driver just before the flight was called."

Donald paused to answer one of the phones on his desk. "Yes, yes, put him on," he said. "Hello, Governor, Donald here. How can I be of service?" Donald listened, then said, "Yes, they are here right now, and I'll tell them."

When he hung up, Brian Donald said, "That was our governor, Sir Henry Lansdowne." He regarded his two visitors curiously. "You're invited to Government House for cocktails this evening when you arrive back in Roseau."

"Thanks for relaying his invitation," Shayne said. "You said something about its being curious we should ask about Metzendorf and Adams."

"I did, didn't I? This taxi driver is a bit of a villain. I've suspected him before of putting tourists off Carib with talk about incompetent pilots, obsolete aircraft and that sort of rot, just to get a fare to Roseau and perhaps a cut for steering them to the night boat. So I had the fellow in this morning. He told me an odd tale."

Shayne and Lucy listened intently.

"He said he delivered a message to them from this chap Conrad on Guadeloupe — the hotel man, you know. It advised the two you mention to come along by boat."

"Do telephone messages re-

ceived here at the airport for passengers usually get delivered by taxi drivers?" Lucy asked.

Brian Donald flushed. "By no means, young lady. It was very irregular, I assure you. I've spoken to the operator and it won't happen again. The odd thing about this message was that it was phon-ed from Portsmouth, over on the other shore."

Mike Shayne picked that up. "Was Conrad on Dominica at the time?"

Donald shook his head. "He flew to Guadeloupe by private jet from New York City and to the best of my knowledge has never visited Her Majesty's island. He should have. We could use a Conrad hotel over at Portsmouth. That's one of the finest landlocked harbors in the Caribbean." Donald paused, frowning.

"It's possible a yachtsman could have relayed Conrad's message to the two you've mentioned. It's a port of call for many wealthy people who know the Caribbean."

"Possible," the detective admitted. "Thanks — you've been very helpful."

"Will you be having cocktails with Sir Henry this evening?" Donald asked.

"I'm afraid so," Shayne said.

Lucy laughed. "Mr. Shayne would prefer the dentist to a cocktail party," she told the airport manager.

Donald laughed, too, then said, "I wonder if you'd mind calling to

Sir Henry's attention that our runway here needs some repair? It's getting in fearful shape and my requests have gone unheeded."

"What do you think?" Lucy asked when they'd begun the thirty-five mile drive back across the island.

Shayne was in a gravely thoughtful mood. "I don't like the way this is shaping up," he said, eyes on the winding road. "It begins to look as if someone set up Allen Metzendorf and Wayne Adams. We'll have to see how Tim made out today before we know too much."

"This *Sect Rouge* you've mentioned?" Lucy asked.

"Could be."

Tim was waiting for them at the hotel bar, drinking boilermakers to the despair of the black bartender.

"Our elusive pair didn't clear through customs or the passport office," he reported. "They did take the night boat down to Guadeloupe. Do I get the brass ring?"

"And the Kewpie Doll," the redhead said. "Bingo! Lucy, go out in the lobby and phone Sir Henry our regrets. Tim, go back aboard the *Blue Dawn* and tell Pete to meet us down on Guadeloupe in the *Pointe-a-Pitre* roadstead — we'll be in touch. Do you happen to know when this night boat sails?"

Tim finished his drink, Lucy left for the lobby and a telephone. "In about an hour," he told Shayne after a glance at his watch.

"You've haven't seen that barge yet. Are you sure you want to take a chance? You'll be the only white people aboard."

"Metzendorf and Adams took their chances," Shayne told him. He picked up the bar tab for Tim. "See you on Guadeloupe."

By the time Lucy returned, he had ordered tall rum drinks in frosted glasses, to the delight of the bartender.

"Sir Henry regrets our inability to join him for cocktails," she reported. "I didn't mention the airport runway."

"Just as well," Shayne said. "Drink up — we have to pack and catch a boat . . . barge, Tim calls it."

The *Caribbean Lady*, rising and falling with the oily swells at the waterfront dock, looked as if she had seen much better days. The single deck of the small steamer flaking paint was jammed with black men, women, children and infants taking passage from *Roseau* to *Pointe-a-Pitre*.

There was, however, a cabin available for, "You, mon, and de-lady," the Jamaican captain assured Shayne. The captain was a hulking black with a glistening shaved head and a front gold tooth that flashed whenever he smiled.

Mike Shayne paid him for the passage and the cabin, then asked, "You had two other white passengers a short time ago. Did they use the cabin?"

"Why you ask *me*, mon?"

Shayne smiled. "They were friends of ours."

Deckhands were casting off and the captain abruptly left them without answering the question.

"Well, we knew this wasn't the Cunard Line," Lucy said in a dry voice. "Do you suppose this hulk will get us from here to there?"

"It better," Shayne said. "We don't have water wings."

The cabin was small but neat with two bunks. There was a constant hubbub from the deck outside as the black passengers settled down for the long night at sea. There was no lock of any kind on the cabin door.

Shayne and Lucy had missed supper in their rush to pack and get aboard and there were no dining facilities of any kind. The other passengers had brought their own food. Leaving the harbor, they passed the *Blue Dawn* swinging at anchor and Lucy sighed.

"Maybe you should tell me why we're doing this, Michael." She sat on the edge of a bunk and tested the thin mattress with her hand.

"Elementary," he said. "Metzendorf and Adams receive a message telling them to take this boat instead of the Carib plane. They came aboard at *Roseau* according to Tim. They don't reach Guadeloupe on the boat so far as we know."

"Or if they do they don't deliver the securities," Lucy said. She

shuddered slightly. "I'm sorry I asked."

Mike Shayne sat on the opposite bunk and frowned in thought. Absent-mindedly, he punched the mattress. "Along about now, they must have realized something had gone wrong," he mused.

"Yes?" Lucy waited.

He got up. "Now we're moving," he said, "I'm going to have another chat with our good captain."

The deck passengers were just settling down for the night as the *Caribbean Lady* rounded Scott's Head and headed for Guadeloupe. The redhead stepped over black women nursing babies, men playing cards, some who were still eating out of paper sacks and cardboard boxes. These reminded him how no supper and the fresh salt air sharpens the appetite.

Each group, as Shayne passed, would stop their conversation and stare after him in silence. Try as he might, he couldn't keep himself from feeling like an alien from another planet, a thing of curiosity. For the first time it came home to him how a single black person must feel in all-white company.

The captain was in the wheelhouse, sipping coffee from a chipped and stained mug. "You again, mon?" he asked in an uninterested voice.

"Me again," the detective admitted.

"Them two you said about used the cabin as long as they was

aboard, mon. My boat, she ain't no ferry, you understand, mon?"

"How long were they on board?"

The captain shrugged. Over the rim of his cup, he regarded Shayne with eyes turned cold, calculating, hostile. "They aboard my ship, mon, until they get off."

The helmsman, a short, very thin black man, kept glancing back over his shoulder. His eye caught Shayne's and he shook his head ever so slightly. Shayne nodded.

"Thanks, captain," he said.

"For what, mon?"

"Not much," he said.

He returned to the cabin. He found Lucy sitting cross-legged on one of the bunks, doing her nails. "Find out anything?" she asked.

"Not yet," he said. "Our captain isn't exactly a fountain for information but I may have someone else who wants to tell us something. Will you be all right if I stay on deck a while?"

Lucy put away the nailfile. "You've met a pretty woman and are going to two-time me."

He smiled. "Count on it, Angel."

"Don't stay out too late."

"Promise," he said.

### VIII

MIKE SHAYNE waited an hour, lounging in the shadow of a doorway between the wheelhouse and the forecastle, until he saw the helmsman's relief climb the ladder

to the wheelhouse. The thin little man who had been on watch came down the ladder, hesitated, looking fore and aft, then came along the deck to where the detective was standing. As he was passing, Shayne reached out to take his arm. He drew the man into the shadow with him.

"What happened to the two men?" he asked in a low voice. His fingers on the man's arm told him a shiver had run through the thin body. "I'm trying to find them, but not to do them any harm," he added in a soothing voice. "Why did the captain say this isn't a ferry?"

"A boat, she stop us, they go away on her, mon," the man whispered.

"What sort of boat? A yacht?"

"No, mon. She a fishing boat. Very strange."

"Did they go of their own free will?" Shayne asked.

"I don't know, mon." The man hesitated, his eyes studying the detective's, then he asked, "You come for them papers, mon?"

Shayne was to tell Lucy later, "The guy startled me out of my shoes!"

"The young one, he give me them," the man went on. "Before they go aboard fishing boat, he give me them. Pay me well and say someone come soon."

"Where are they?" Shayne asked.

"On this boat, mon. In the forecastle — hid. No one find them."

"Will you bring them to me here?"

"No, mon. Someone see us. I bring them to the cabin. You pay me then?"

"How much?"

"Young man say a hundred dollar."

"You've got it," Shayne said, "as soon as I have the papers."

The little man was suddenly suspicious. "Why you not know how much to pay me?"

Mike Shayne smiled, let go of his arm, patted a thin shoulder. "He told me to make it two hundred if all the papers are there."

"They all there, mon."

The man went forward toward the forecastle, Shayne went aft to the cabin. Lucy's bunk was turned down and rumpled but she wasn't in the cabin. He hurried out on deck and began to make the rounds of the ship. Most of the deck passengers were sprawled out asleep and he had to step over their recumbent bodies.

"Lucy?" he kept calling in a low voice.

He found her in the stern between a young black man and a younger black woman, her back to the rail as she sat on the deck. In her arms was a sleeping black baby. "Hello, Michael," she said with a bright smile. "Meet my new friends." She nodded toward the young man. "Joseph." She touched the girl's shoulder. "Ellen." Lucy smiled down at the sleeping baby. "This is Joseph,

Jr. Isn't he an angel?"

The girl smiled up at Shayne and the man lifted a listless hand. Lucy handed the baby to his mother and got up, brushing her skirt.

"Good night," she told her new friends and took the redhead's arm. "You probably want to know why I'm not tucked in and sleeping, Michael," she said. "There are hundreds, no thousands, of very good reasons."

"Name one," Shayne said in a gruff voice. Only now could he admit to himself how frightened he had been to find an empty cabin.

"I don't know his Latin name but we call him bedbug," Lucy told him.

He groaned. "That's all we need!"

It was half an hour after they were back in the cabin before there was a soft rap on the unlocked door. Shayne opened it to find the thin little man outside, a shiny black leather briefcase tucked under one arm.

Shayne counted two hundred dollars in twenties into his free hand. Without a word the man handed over the briefcase and scuttled away. Shayne examined it in the dim light of the cabin. A wire-and-metal seal assured him it had not been opened. He broke the seal and shook out the contents on his bunk.

He sighed and Lucy gasped. "Now you know what they mean

when they say gilt-edge securities," he told her. Scooping up a handful, he handed them to her. "Start adding up the face amounts."

Facing each other across the cabin they began to shuffle the valuable paper.

"I've a neat quarter of a million here," Lucy said finally. She had done the adding in her head. "What do you have?"

"Give me time, give me time." Mike Shayne was scrawling on an envelope with his ballpoint pen. He added a column. "Three quarters of a million," he mused. "added to what you have, a cool one million dollars in negotiable paper." He began tucking the securities back into the shiny briefcase. "Now our job is half finished."

"Clue me, will you?" Lucy said, impatient.

"Allen Metzendorf was a very smart fellow," he told her.

"Run that past me again?" Lucy asked. "I'm not following you."

"When this fishing boat came alongside, and they probably claimed Conrad had sent them to pick the two men off this ship, Allen smelled a rat. So what did he do?"

"You tell me," Lucy said, vexed. "This is your line of speculation."

"Not speculation," he said, nodding to the repacked briefcase on his bunk. "Fact. Allen entrust-

ed the half of the million he was carrying to the little crewman with promise of a hundred-dollar reward if he hid it without telling anyone else."

"How would he know which one to trust?" Lucy asked.

"I'd guess he became suspicious when he came aboard this ratty ship and scouted around among the crew until he found our man."

Lucy scowled. "Would you trust anyone aboard this scow with a million in negotiable securities?"

"Yes. I'd only tell them they were valuable papers and pick a man who couldn't read, however."

"Which you think Allen Metzendorf did?" Lucy said.

Mike Shayne nodded. "I'd bet on it."

Lucy clucked skeptically. "With a pair of infested bunks, Wise One, what do you suggest we do for sleep tonight?" She patted a yawn. "I'm also hungry."

"This bucket has a galley somewhere," he said. "You pick us a nice place on deck to snuggle down and I'll roust up some food. Okay?"

Lucy's good humor was back. "Okay. What do we do with the briefcase?"

"We can't lock it in the cabin," he said. "Take it with you. The other deck passengers won't notice. I have a hunch they think all of us white people are crazy anyhow."

Lucy tucked the briefcase under her arm. "I'd like a nice cheese souffle when you find the gallery, Michael," she said.

"Will you settle for rice and beans?" he asked.

Lucy smiled. "Lovely!"

He found the galley by following the smell of cooking food. Two young blacks in soiled whites were stirring pots on the stove. Shayne lounged in the open doorway.

"What you want, mon?" one of the cooks asked.

"What do you have?" he asked.

"Rice and fish, mon, but the captain no let us serve passengers," the other cook said.

Shayne reached for his wallet and extracted a ten-dollar bill.

The cook who had just spoken reached up to a shelf for two tin plates. "Got two five dollar, mon?" he asked.

"Sure." The detective substituted a pair of fives for the ten and handed one to each cook before he picked up the heaped plates.

"Thanks."

"We never seen you, mon," one cook said.

## IX

LUCY HAD found an empty bench toward the stern of the ship and they spent the night stretched out there, bundled up against the damp and cold night breeze. It was uncomfortable, yet at the same time a night they would always

remember with a certain nostalgia. Huddled there with the other deck passengers, sharing their discomfort, they felt a kinship to the others they would always treasure.

Finally, fitfully, they slept, side by side, holding hands.

The ship was still in the water when Mike Shayne opened his eyes. He sat up. The anchor chains had clattered through the hawse holes without awakening him and the *Caribbean Lady* rested on mirror-smooth black water like some rakish swan. A pale colorless light was just appearing above the eastern horizon.

All around, the other deck passengers were still sound asleep except for one mother, propped against the rail, calmly nursing her infant. It was Ellen. He raised a hand in morning greeting. She smiled and nodded.

As if by magic the light became soft yellow, then flame red, and houses and streets of *Pointe-a-Pitre* with green hills rising behind the town became visible. But there was no life in the narrow streets, and the houses seemed asleep.

The town and the hills became a mirror-reflection on the dark water. He touched Lucy's shoulder. "Sack time is over, sweetheart," he told her. "Come see the sun rise."

Lucy, as was her habit, was instantly awake and alert. She sat up, pulling her jacket tighter

around her shoulders, to stare at the morning beauty and drink it in.

"We'll never forget this moment, will we, Michael?" she said in a soft voice.

His arm slipped around her. "Never."

Lucy moved the briefcase on her lap. After a few moments, a little stiff after a night on the wooden bench, they stepped around without awakening the other deck passengers to find their empty cabin.

Lucy stepped into it ahead of Mike, stiffened, jarred back into him. "My God!" she whispered.

The thin little crewman lay on the floor between the two bunks, one knee drawn up, arms at his sides, the pink palms of his hands up. From his slashed throat dark blood puddled the cabin floor. The ebony face was blank, the sightless eyes stared off into eternity.

Shayne, swearing softly, pulled Lucy back out of the cabin and shut the door, but not before he had seen the bloody scrawl on the white paint above the bunk where he would have slept if it hadn't been for the bedbugs.

A finger dipped in the little crewman's blood had written, *You next.*

"What do we do?" Lucy asked.

"Get ashore," Mike Shayne said grimly. "Report to the Perfect of Police. Stow the briefcase in a safe place."

"What then?" Lucy asked.

"I stash you with Pete and Tim aboard the *Blue Dawn* and go after

the bastards who have young Metzendorf, Adams and a million in securities they don't know what to do with yet."

"Remember one thing, Michael."

"What's that?" he asked.

"You may think you're the Avenging Angel but you're not. He's immortal."

He touched her cheek. "I'll bear it in mind."

Pierre Gascoigne, the perfect of police on Guadeloupe, was a stocky, broad-shouldered man of Tuscan peasant stock who had been brought to Guadeloupe as a child. He had learned his trade with the *Surete* in Paris before returning to the island to take his present position. When Shayne reported the murdered crewman aboard the *Caribbean Lady*, Gascoigne didn't bat an eyelash.

He invited the redhead to sit in his office and sent off a black constable to investigate. Studying his visitor, Gascoigne lit a thin cigar with a gold lighter.

"Where do you come from, *m'sieur*?" he asked. "I find it strange you should have come from Roseau on the night boat."

Something about the stolid man inspired confidence. Shayne handed across the desk his private investigator's credentials.

"Check with the Chief of Police in Miami Beach if you wish," the detective said. "He'll vouch for me."

Gascoigne nodded. "I assure

you I will, but no offense. These are troubled times on Guadeloupe. You have come about M'sieur Conrad's missing securities? I've expected someone to arrive."

Mike Shayne had brought the briefcase with him. Now he laid it on Gascoigne's desk. He sat back, arms crossed on his chest, while the French policeman examined the contents.

Gascoigne looked up when he had finished examining the securities. "Where did you obtain these?"

Shayne told him why he and Lucy had come to Guadeloupe aboard the *Caribbean Lady*, what he had learned about Allen Metzendorf and Wayne Adams from the murdered crewman, how he had bought the briefcase and its contents for \$200.

"I'd guess the rest of the securities, as well as Metzendorf and Adams, are somewhere here on island," He said. "I can use whatever help you can give me to find them."

Gascoigne studied the glowing tip of his cigar, pursing his lips. "You Americans have the saying, should you scratch my back I'll scratch yours, M'sieur. Is this not true?"

Shayne nodded. "Quid pro quo, this for that."

"Japan has its Red Army, the Palestinians their P.L.O. terrorist organization, the Irish their I.R.A. We are plagued here on Guadeloupe by what is known as the

*Sect Rouge*. It is they who have taken credit for killing Bertram Conrad's chauffeur during their attempt to assassinate him. You are familiar with this crime?"

"Yes, but no details."

"*St. Cloud* is a suburb of *Basse Terre* on the other half of our butterfly island," Gascoigne told Mike. "It is where our more fortunate reside and where Bertram Conrad was a house guest. The attempt was made on the short road between the town of *Basse Terre* and *St. Cloud*."

"Where is Conrad now?" Mike Shayne asked.

"At St. Louis on *Marie Galante*. His private plane took him there after the assassination attempt. It is a small island to the south of us. You know of his plans to buy it?"

"Yes."

"The deal is uncertain now. This is most unfortunate for us here on Guadeloupe. But no matter. I will come to the point. We have under house arrest a man known only to us as Sean Lafferty. Have you any idea how many arms and how much explosive two million dollars can buy?"

Shayne nodded.

"I see you have," Gascoigne said. "This Rafferty, we've established, is a member of the I.R.A. We suspect he arrived on Guadeloupe after the disappearance of Metzendorf and Adams to conclude an arms deal with our *Sect Rouge*."

"I didn't know the I.R.A. is in

the business of selling arms," Shayne said.

"We have reason to believe that they are and use the profits to buy more sophisticated weapons for their own use. I finally come to the point and thank you for your patience, *M'sieur*. Shayne."

"Let me guess," Shayne said. "The *Sect Rouge* doesn't know you've nabbed Lafferty?"

"That is correct."

"I'm redhead and Irish enough to pinch hit for him?"

"If the term pinch hit means take his place, yes."

"And lead you directly to the *Sect Rouge* leaders," Shayne finished. "They left me a note scrawled in blood that I'm next. Sort of blows my cover, doesn't it?"

"Not necessarily," Gascoigne said. "In a secret organization the left hand seldom knows exactly what the right hand is doing."

The constable sent to the harbor to board the *Caribbean Lady* knocked and entered Gascoigne's office with a curious glance at Shayne. At rigid attention he reported to Gascoigne in the *Patios* French mixed with African words that is the native language of Guadeloupe.

When the young black constable had turned on his heel and left the office, Gascoigne asked the redhead, "Did you understand his report?"

Shayne shook his head.

"The ship is British registry.

What happens aboard her on the high seas is not our business here, but the Jamaican captain allowed our man to come aboard and check the cabin you shared. There was no body. There was no blood either. The ship's captain says you're a liar."

Shayne flushed with anger. Gascoigne raised a manicured hand and, for the first time since Mike had entered his office, permitted himself a thin smile. "You are surprised? I am not, *M'sieur*. We deal with very clever people. The captain of the *Caribbean Lady*, we have long suspected, is in league with the *Sect Rouge* here on Guadeloupe. These terrorist organizations do business with each other but, like the theives of this world, there is no honor among them."

"An I.R.A. courier would know about the missing million, I suspect," the detective said.

"Exactly." Gascoigne touched the waxed points of his moustache. "Their spies are everywhere, even here on Guadeloupe."

"It's possible they figured I was ripping them off," Mike Shayne told the Frenchman. "Maybe we can pull this masquerade off after all."

"Good! You are a brave man, *M'sieur*."

"Or a damned fool," Shayne said in a dry voice. "I've seen a sample of their work. How do we set it up?"

"You will register at the *Hotel de Guise* under the name of Colonel Baker. They will contact you. The code word is Napoleon. You will be watched by my most trusted men. When the rendezvous has been arranged to your satisfaction, you will somehow advise me of the time and place."

Shayne thought about that before answering. "I have two interests here," he said. "One, to get young Metzendorf and Wayne Adams out of the hands of the *Sect Rouge*."

"If they are still alive," Gascoigne qualified.

"I happen to think they are," Shayne said.

"I hope that you are right," Gascoigne said. "We have no word on that score from my informants."

"If your *Sect Rouge* know their business, they are," Shayne told him. "Put yourself in their place. Alive, they could be worth the million they are missing in ransom."

Gascoigne nodded. "Now you point that out, it is reasonable. Your second interest?"

"The other million in negotiable securities — and, by the way, I'll need a receipt from you for those in that briefcase."

"You do business like a Frenchman," Gascoigne said.

"One more thing," the redhead told him. "Send men aboard the *Blue Dawn* to search the yacht from mast to keel. Make a real fuss about it when they find she

isn't loaded with weapons."

Gascoigne regarded him with hooded eyes. "Why should I do that?"

"I want your *Sect Rouge* sure that I haven't brought along a shipment. If they are as good as you think they are, they'll tie me in with the yacht before they make contact." Shayne got up to leave. "Is there a back door?"

"There is," Gascoigne said. "M'sieur, you have the nature of a conspirator."

The detective smiled. "I always enjoyed Sean Connery's 007 movies on the late show."

## X

SHAYNE WENT from the police station to register at the *Hotel de Guise* and discovered it was a seamy hotel near the waterfront. Gascoigne had furnished him with a forged passport confiscated from Sean Lafferty in case the hotel clerk asked to see it. The slender black girl behind the desk asked no questions. She gave him a second-floor room with a view of the roadstead.

Mike Shayne watched the police launch leave the wharf and head out to where Pete had anchored the *Blue Dawn*. He knew Lucy Hamilton and Tim Rourke well enough to realize they'd know the search was a red herring and would act appropriately indignant and suspicious without spoiling the ploy.

Coat and shoes off, he stretched out on the bed and studied the ceiling of his room, blanking out of his mind any thoughts of failure.

If Lafferty traveled as Colonel Baker he wouldn't have a hint of a brogue. That was good. At the same time, when contact was finally established, it would not hurt to let slip some of the Irish word patterns he had learned from his father. But no brogue.

Mike Shayne had not worn ashore the yachting coat and cap Lucy had bought for him. Now he wished he had, but it was too late. His .45 Colt was in its shoulder holster with an extra clip in the pocket of his sports jacket. He had second thoughts about the double-breasted coat and white cap. Too conspicuous, too hard to reach his weapon when he needed it.

He pulled on his loafers and shrugged into his coat. Time to find out how good Gascoigne's men shadowing him were. By the time he reached the duty-free shop at the harbor dock he had spotted two of them. One was a tall brown-skinned man with a straw hat, the other a short black man dressed as a laborer. The tall man acted as if he were a tourist down for the day from Dominica, he discovered in the duty-free shop.

The redhead bought one of the colorful wide-brimmed fishermen's hats worn by the whites on *Terre de Haut* in the small *Des Saintes* islands off the south coast

Guadeloupe. Made of linen and bamboo, the hat had a Chinese cast. It was, he thought, what an Irishman from the rainy Emerald Isle would buy to protect his face from the hot tropic sun. He also bought a pair of dark sunglasses.

*My God!* he thought when he saw his reflection in a store window. *Fu Manchu himself.*

His shadows were fairly competent. Maybe the hat would make their job easier. He stepped into a small waterfront bar for a sandwich and drink. He took his food and rum collins outside to sit at one of the small iron tables with a view of the harbor. The police boat was returning from the *Blue Dawn*.

Two brown-skinned girls settled at the only other table outside the small bar under the canvas canopy.

*It doesn't take long for the local talent to move in on a tourist,* he thought when the girls eyed him and giggled to each other.

The younger and prettier of the two prostitutes got up and left after a few minutes. Her sister in the oldest profession caught Shayne's eye.

He forgot her to search behind his dark glasses for Gascoigne's shadows.

Usually alert to everything and everyone around him, he smelled the older woman's musky perfume before he realized she had moved to his table. With a start he glanced around.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You're very attractive but I'm expecting a friend. Another time?"

The woman wet her lips with the tip of her tongue. "I know a place that serves Napoleon brandy," she said.

He tensed inside but kept his facial expression bland. "Is that a fact?" he said. "I prefer Martell but maybe your taste is better than mine. Of course Irish Whiskey is best."

A water bustled from the bar, still putting on his apron. "This one bother you, mon?" he asked in an indignant voice.

Shayne waved him away.

The woman smiled. "Napoleon was a great Frenchman."

"No match for Himself, St. Patrick,"

The woman got up to leave. "Stay at the room in your hotel," she said in a low voice the suspicious waiter couldn't overhear, then spat on him, "You a son of a bitch, mon!"

Shayne winked at the waiter as she flounced off down the street, switching her hips.

"Do you know that one?" he asked.

The waiter's was a puzzled frown. "No, mon. Maybe come from another island."

Shayne shrugged. "Maybe."

Leaving a generous tip, he made his way back to the Hotel de Guise and his room. The tall shadow would probably bring a newspaper

into the lobby while his partner watched from across the street. Shayne suspected that whoever was keeping an eye on his movements for the *Sect Rouge* knew he was being followed by police agents. That was all right. They would link it to the search of the *Blue Dawn*.

There was a knock on his door. He had left it unlocked. Facing the door from across the room, hand inside his jacket and on the .45 Colt, he said, "It's open — come in."

It was the girl desk clerk with an envelope. "A boy just brought him for you, M'sieur Baker," the girl told him.

"Thanks." Mike Shayne flipped a coin, which she caught. "Put it on the dresser."

When she was gone, he locked the door and opened the note.

*Desirade. Tomorrow. Four A.M. A mile off west end of island.*

So they had identified him with the *Blue Dawn* and expected him to make the rendezvous aboard her. *Desirade*, he discovered by referring to the complimentary map given him at the duty-free shop, lay about ten miles east of *Grande Terre*. It was designated as an arid island populated solely by fishermen.

He ventured down into the lobby. Sure enough, there was his tall shadow reading a newspaper. Whistling, he passed the man on

his way to the street and dropped the note on the carpet at his feet. He turned down the street without looking back.

That ball was in Prefect Gascoigne's court.

## XI

*THE CARIBBEAN LADY* lay at the dock just beyond the duty-free shop, being made ready for the return voyage to Dominica. Only the short shadow dressed as a laborer was following him now. He ducked into the duty-free shop. The man crossed the street to watch the doorway.

Shayne passed through the shop and found himself in a narrow alley. He worked his way through other alleys to the dock where the *Caribbean lady* was tied up. Crossing the street, having discarded the conspicuous fishermen's hat in a trash can, he saw the short shadow patiently waiting outside the shop.

He slipped aboard the ship. "Captain?" he asked the first crewman he met.

"In his cabin, mon. Forward and starboard."

He didn't bother to knock. He braced against the opposite bulkhead and kicked the door open with his right foot. He was in the cabin with his shoulders to the door before the Jamaican captain could roll out of his bunk.

Mike Shayne drew, cocked and

aimed his .45 Colt before the man could blink awake. "Pass the word," he said. "Those two Americans. I want them, and alive, before there is any deal."

The man passed a hand over his shaven head. "You crazy, mon."

"My people need them to make another deal," Shayne said.

"You got half your money, mon," the Jamaican protested.

Shayne uttered a hard, mirthless laugh. "Right from under your ugly nose," he jeered. "You people are rank amateurs."

The captain glared at him with bloodshot eyes, his hands clamping and unclamping at his sides as he rose from the rumpled bunk that smelled of sweat.

"I wish you'd try to jump me," Shayne told him.

The belligerent mood was suddenly gone and the Jamaican fawned. "Put away that piece, mon. I pass the word."

"Good." Shayne backed out into the alleyway.

"I pass the word *good*, mon," the captain said again. "You not to worry."

The redhead hired a skiff to get back aboard the *Blue Dawn* when he had checked out of the Hotel de Guise. Lucy wrapped her arms around him as he came over the side. "Why all the fuzz this morning, Michael?" she asked.

He kissed her. "I hope you were properly indignant."

Lucy smiled and nodded. "Tim

was superb. I just acted miffed. Pete raised holy hell."

"Where is Pete?" the redhead asked.

"In the wheelhouse with Tim."

"We're taking a little cruise this evening," he told Lucy, and explained the role he was now playing.

Lucy Hamilton heaved a sigh when Shayne finished telling her he was to meet the *Sect Rouge* leaders as Colonel Baker, otherwise known as Sean Lafferty.

"Michael, I thought this was supposed to be sort of a rest cure," she said. "I should have known better, however, come to think of it. You draw trouble the way a tall pine on top of a hill draws lightning."

Shayne grinned. "Trouble must agree with you, Angel. You haven't complained about headaches since we left Key West."

"That's a fact," Lucy admitted. "You've got me used to the strenuous life."

Mike found Tim and Pete drinking beer in the wheelhouse of the *Blue Dawn*. They listened intently while he told them about the four o'clock rendezvous off *Desirade* with the *Sect Rouge* principals.

"Tricky business," was Pete's comment when he finished. "Wouldn't we be damned fools to depend on your friend Gascoigne showing up in the nick of time?"

Tim nodded agreement. "Murphy's Law will probably apply," he said. "Anything that can go

wrong will."

"Only if we let them deal all the cards," Shayne said. "A fishing boat took Metzendorf and Adams off the *Caribbean Lady*. *Desirade* is an island of fishermen. There's a small village at the end of it and that's probably where they're holding the two men. Here's the way I think we should do it."

When he had finished, Pete scratched his head and frowned. But he admitted, "It might work."

"What about sharks?" Tim asked.

"Bite your tongue," Shayne told him.

Running full speed ahead through glassy seas, Pete Foley reached for the east end of ten-mile-long *Desirade* and sighted his destination at ten minutes before midnight.

"Damned charts aren't too accurate about these waters." Pete apologized to the detective. "I can't run in closer than half a mile."

"That's close enough," Shayne said. He zipped up the wet suit and blew through the snorkel.

Pete eased back the throttles and the twin diesels purred. The *Blue Dawn*'s speed slowed and its bow waved smoothed out. There was no vibration now. Pete was running dark.

"About time," he told Shayne. "Gather your gear and go over the stern when I stop the engines."

"Okay."

Tim Rourke shook the detective's hand. "Good luck."

Mike Shayne padded aft, the swim fins making plopping sounds on the dew-wet deck. Lucy was waiting for him on the afterdeck with the plastic bag he had packed earlier. In it were his .45 Colt with a silencer screwed to the barrel, a box of .45 shells, a sheathed hunting knife, a small coil of thin line, 30 feet of it. There were also five chocolate candy bars in the bag. The final item was a pair of rope sandals.

When she handed him the bag, the redhead strapped it to the belt of his wet suit. "You look like the beast from forty fathoms," Lucy told him. Her voice wasn't as brave as she intended it to be. "Michael, be careful."

He glanced at the waterproof watch calibrated with figures large enough to be seen in the depths. "Don't worry. Four hours from now this will all be over and we can head back for Miami Beach."

"I'll take that as a promise," Lucy said.

The *Blue Dawn*'s engines stopped ticking over and the yacht slowed and stopped. Feet first, Shayne went over the stern into the warm Caribbean water, striking out for the dim outline that was the west end of *Desirade*.

He found a thin strip of beach when he reached the shore with a steep, rocky slope behind it that rose to the plateau which formed

the interior of the island. He pulled off the swim fins and slung them over his shoulder before unzipping the wet suit.

Then Shayne strode off to walk the ten miles along whatever beach he could find, reaching the small fishing village, he hoped, in three hours. With luck, sooner.

It was a beautifully clear night with unblinking stars. He filled his lungs as he walked with the fresh smell of the ocean scented with seaweed.

He made better time than he had hoped, arriving in sight of the village huts at two-thirty-five by his underwater watch. Wearing the wet suit, with rope sandals instead of swim fins, he eased closer to the nearest huts. In one of the two dozen were the *Sect Rouge* leaders who would go out to meet the *Blue Dawn*. In that hut, or one nearby he guessed, would be Allen Metzendorf and Wayne Adams.

A dozen typical Caribbean fishing boats bobbed along the village waterfront. As yet there was no sign of life on the wharf. *Good!*

He wondered where Gascoigne and his men were right now. Cruising with lights out in the wake of the *Blue Dawn*? Out of sight astern, they could be following the yacht on radar. More likely, Shayne thought, Gascoigne in the police launch might be cruising near enough to the rendezvous point to close in at the critical moment. He decided, whatever

the case, it didn't really matter.

## XII

THE KEY ELEMENT in Shayne's plan was surprise. Tactically, by coming ashore, he had outflanked the enemy. How best to capitalize on this advantage?

He studied the brightly painted fishing boats bobbing alongside the wharf that jutted into the shallow bay. They were typical Caribbean fishing boats except for one, larger than the rest. No nets hung to dry from its spars. Painted dark blue, it was a clinker-built boat of about forty feet with a full deck and small deckhouse. The hulls of the other boats had only half decks.

There was plenty of room in the hull of the smaller boat for a sample shipment of weapons. That was what they *Sect Rouge* leaders would expect when they had negotiated quantity and price. They would assume from the failure of a police search that the weapons were well hidden, probably in the bilge of the *Blue Dawn*.

Mike Shayne saw a ragged man come from one of the huts close to the water and, stretching, yawning, wander out onto the wharf. He stooped to test the mooring of one of the small fishing boats, then stood on the wharf, staring out to sea.

"Thank you, Lady Luck!" Shayne breathed as he began the stalk.

He had heard the sun-warped

floor boards of the wharf creak under the man's feet. There was no chance to take him where he stood. Shayne flattened behind a dory pulled up on the narrow beach beside the wharf and waited.

The fisherman finally ambled back toward where Mike was waiting. He'd pass within a few feet of the dory. One startled cry would arouse half the village. Shayne gritted his teeth, rose to a crouch, waited.

With the grace and quickness of a big cat Shayne sprang on the luckless fisherman from behind and blanketed his mouth with a rubber-covered arm. When the man's clutching hands came up, he planted a knee in the small of the man's back and hissed, "Be still and you won't get hurt. Fight me, I'll break your back!"

The man's thin body went slack.

"No noise," Shayne said, "and I'll let you breathe."

The redhead's captive mumbled assent and Shayne lowered his arm but kept his knee in the man's back. "Your name?" he asked.

"I called Paul."

"Good! Paul, I've come for the two Americans. Where are they?"

"Those men . . ." Paul hesitated. "I be killed if tell you," he pleaded. "My wife and family too, mon."

"You'll be killed here and now if you don't tell me," Shayne grated. "Take your choice. Where are they in the village?"

"Not in the village anymore. Last night they put aboard *Sect Rouge* boat."

"The big one with a full deck?"

"That one."

"Are they guarded?"

"No. They can't escape nowhere."

Shayne hesitated, then said, "Paul, you're going to help me. The tide's going out, isn't it?"

"Yes, mon."

"All right. We're going to slip the moorings of every fishing boat except the *Sect Rouge* craft and set them adrift."

"Hey, mon! They drift out into the bay."

"Right," Mike Shayne said. "That done, we sail away in the *Sect Rouge* boat."

Paul didn't speak.

"Can you start its engine?

"Sure, mon."

"Let's go then."

"You one crazy American," Paul said.

Shayne let the young man out of his grasp, but showed him the silenced .45. "Don't get tricky," he advised. "I'm crazy enough to use this."

Paul threw up his hands in alarm. "No way, mon! I got me family. We hate these *Sect Rouge* people but got no choice until now."

It was the work of minutes to untie all the fishing boats and shove them adrift. This done, Shayne and Paul boarded the large boat. In the deckhouse Mike found the

two haggard and unshaven men shackled back to back.

While Paul went aft to start the auxiliary engine, Mike crouched beside Metzendorf and Adams in the half-darkness of the deckhouse.

"We're taking you out to safety," he told them.

"Who are you?" Allen Metzendorf croaked.

"Mike Shayne. Your father sent me."

The auxiliary engine backfired twice and then settled down to a ragged beat. "Sit tight," he told the two men and left them.

The wheel was on the open deck aft. Paul had unmoored the boat. Mike swung it away from the wharf and called down into the engine cockpit, "All it has, Paul."

Before twenty feet separated the boat from the wharf, feet pounded on the boards. Four dark figures, each armed with an automatic weapon, were shouting. Paul poked his head up out of the engine cockpit just ahead of the wheel.

"Down!" The redhead yelled at him. Crouching, steering the moving boat with his left hand, he fired a round from the silenced .45. One of the figures took a startled step backward and dropped his machine-gun.

Two of the others sprinted off the wharf but the third, dropping to one knee, cut loose a blast of gunfire. The bullets stitched the water as the stream of fire neared

the boat. Mike Shayne ducked lower but was still exposed when the first bullets thunked into the wooden hull.

The staccato abruptly stopped. Shayne looked up. Whoever had been firing at him was changing clips. It was light enough now for him to recognize the woman posing as a prostitute who had passed him the message about the rendezvous!

In the act of squeezing the trigger of his Colt .45, it was too late to stop the shot. But Shayne flinched enough from killing a woman to miss his aim. It was nearly a fatal mistake.

Her weapon reloaded, kneeling to brace against the recoil, a second hail of lead spouted from the short ugly barrel of her weapon. She had the range this time. Bullets splintered the deck and whistled around his ears. But instead of aiming to fire a short burst, aim again, fire again, the woman used the weapon as if it were a garden hose. The scattered shots missed him.

Shayne had sailed out of range. Clearing the mouth of the harbor, he saw the *Blue Dawn* ahead still in the water. The police launch, with a bone in its teeth, swung in sight from behind the yacht, making for shore and the echoing sound of shots. Mike Shayne heaved a sigh of relief.

He looked astern. The wharf was alive with fishermen, shouting and shaking their fists in his direc-

tion. The surface of the bay was afloat with drifting boats.

Gascoigne recognized Shayne's red head and steered the launch alongside the larger boat. The detective saw that it was crowded with grim constables armed with automatic weapons.

"She and her buddies are all yours," Shayne called across to Gascoigne. "They can't get off the island."

Binoculars hung by a strap around Gascoigne's neck. "I've seen, M'sieur. Are you wounded?" "No. Just scared half to death. I've got the Americans aboard so don't worry about them."

When the boat bumped against the yacht, Mike Shayne vaulted the rail after turning over the wheel to Paul. "I owe you money for risking your neck," he called to Paul. "I'll have Prefect Gascoigne bring it to you."

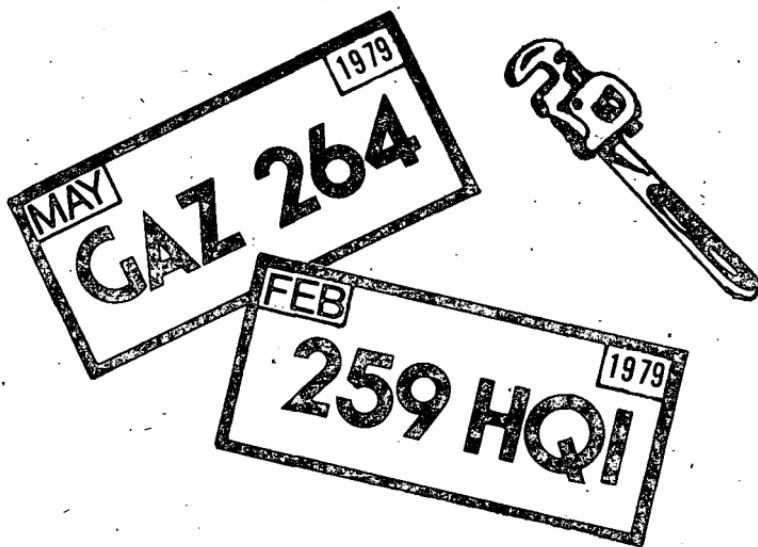
Paul's was a wide white grin. "A thousand thanks, mon."

Wearing the jacket Lucy had bought for him and the yachting cap with gold braid, Mike Shayne lounged at the table in the main cabin, a fifth of Martell in front of him. Lucy and Tim were across the table with their drinks and Pete Foley sat at his left.

Shayne poured a glass half full of the brandy and raised it in a toast. "Here's to the luck of the Irish."

"May it last," Lucy said.

# Leave It To A Pro



by DICK STODGHILL

Now and Then a Private Eye Is Honest — but a Lot of Them  
Find It Hard to Resist a Sure Thing.

IT BEGAN innocently enough. A joke, really. Something to make the dreary hours a little less monotonous. The first evening had been uneventful and now, midway through the second five-hour shift, the assignment had become downright boring.

“Some fun,” Bolka grumbled. “Babysitting a bunch of telephones. There’s no way those vandals are going to come back with us standing around. If they try to send us back out here tomorrow night I’m really going to raise hell.”

He shuffled away, kicked a paper cup lying on the floor, returned to the door where his companion was standing. "Why do you suppose they'd have ten telephone booths in a place like this?" he went on. "I can't believe there'd ever be that many people calling from here at the same time."

Fredoni shrugged, shook his head. Bolka was right, he thought. It didn't make sense, but the booths were there, nevertheless, and the telephone company was paying the agency to have them watched. They stood in a single row along one wall of a wide, dimly lit corridor connecting a drug store with a rear parking lot. The lot served several businesses in a small shopping center along the main street linking downtown with the east side industrial area. Farther out it passed through a succession of suburban bedroom communities, each a little more prestigious than the one before.

"You know it's young punks," Bolka droned on. "Even they have enough sense to spot us."

The harsh, bass voice matched George Bolka's big-boned, barrel-shaped body. His appearance alone was enough to send any potential vandals in search of another target. Long arms hung like oversized sausages from wide, flat shoulders, and size 14 shoes didn't look big at all beneath the massive girth of his legs. His face was rectangular, florid, with

bushy black brows over squinty black eyes and the squashed nose of a boxer. The unlit stub of a cigar was stuck in one corner of his coarse, thick-lipped mouth. A wide-brimmed black hat and long black overcoat completed the unattractive picture.

Fredoni was sick of his partner's complaining. Boring jobs were part of working for a large detective agency and the only thing he could do about it was quit. It wasn't, he often thought, like the life of a television private eye. More often than not the assignments handed out in the morning by an assistant manager turned out to be dull, routine or both. There were exceptions, of course, just often enough to keep him interested.

He stood at the rear door listlessly watching the few cars that left or entered the parking lot. After several minutes of silence he chuckled and called, "Hey, look at this!" Bolka, quick and agile despite his excess poundage, hurried to the door almost hoping to see a gang of youths approaching, weapons in hand.

"Look at those two," said Fredoni, nodding toward a Cadillac sedan parked to the left of the door. A man and woman, oblivious to their surroundings, were kissing passionately in the front seat.

"Cheaters!" Bolka snorted. "Not too smart about it, either."

"Yeah," agreed Fredoni, still chuckling. "They're asking for

trouble. Anybody could walk out this door and see them." Subconsciously he noted the license number.

The embrace ended and the woman got out. By the time she reached the door Fredoni was entering the drug store at the far end of the corridor and Bolka was fumbling for change in front of the booths. She walked to a booth half-way along the row. Bolka quietly slipped into one next to her.

She dialed a number, waited a few seconds and said, "Hello, honey. Can you come and get me? I'm at the drug store — Gray's on Euclid." After a short pause she added, "Bring them with you as long as they're still up. I'll be at the back door. Bye now."

Bolka was mumbling into a dead phone as she stepped out of the booth. She entered the drug store and walked directly to the cosmetics counter, handled an item or two and then checked her makeup in a small, round mirror on the counter. She took a tissue from her purse, wiped her mouth and applied fresh lipstick.

Fredoni, flipping pages of a magazine at a nearby rack, watched her with interest. Good looking, he thought, with the unmistakable air of someone accustomed to money. Bolka walked past him, pausing momentarily to pick up a magazine and whisper, "She called home and her husband and kids are coming to pick her up." Both men grinned.

The woman wandered from counter to counter for a few minutes, paid for several small items at the register and walked the length of the corridor to the rear door. Fredoni moved to the only area of the store where the corridor was visible, pretending to be absorbed in a study of trinkets and impulse sale items.

The headlights of a car illuminated the passageway. The woman opened the door and hurried to it. Fredoni walked to the door and stepped outside in time to see her give the driver a wifely peck on the cheek before turning to two small children in the back seat.

The car, a Lincoln Continental, was backing out when Fredoni reached his battered old Chevrolet. Again he filed the license number in his mind. He walked back inside after the Continental pulled away. Bolka was waiting and the two of them laughed.

"This job," Fredoni said, "all the standing around watching, could give a shakedown artist more work than he could handle."

"Yeah," agreed Bolka, "and don't think it hasn't been done. If you go to the right places and keep your eyes open you can see more than people would ever dream of. Most people are wrapped up in their own thoughts, don't really see what they're looking at. If they did, they wouldn't need us."

Fredoni nodded, took out a small notebook and wrote down the two license numbers. Just for

fun he'd check them out the next day.

Fred Fredoni's appearance was a startling contrast to that of his partner. His slender, five-eight frame had a deceptively fragile look. Actually he was rock-hard, muscular. His features were Latin and his slick black hair combed straight back from a sloping forehead was reminiscent of Valentino. There was an aura of poverty about him, though. It showed in his face and in his apparel. His suit was clean and neatly pressed but off a bargain basement rack. It had been worn too long and so had his shirt, clean but frayed at the collar. His shoes were polished but run over at the heels and, when he crossed his legs, holes were visible in the soles.

His appearance might have been a handicap in a business dependent upon gaining the confidence of strangers. It wasn't, because of a boyish smile that, along with soulful, almost pleading brown eyes, gave him an air of helplessness that brought out the mother instinct in women and made men want to assist the down-on-his-luck young man if they possible could.

There hadn't been a day in Fred Fredoni's life when money wasn't a problem. There wasn't enough of it when he was growing up, when he was married for a stormy two years, or particularly after the divorce that left him saddled with weekly support payments for a

young daughter.

Money was the dominant topic at the dinner table during childhood years in Glenwood, a crowded, tough, east side neighborhood of Poles, Slavs and Italians. His father toiled long hours in the railroad shops and his mother skimped and saved in every way possible, but there never seemed to be enough of anything for the Fredonis and their nine children. It was a common affliction of the neighborhood, though, so the youthful Freddie accepted it as a normal part of everyone's life.

Only Uncle Angelo had money. He wore expensive clothes, smoked fifty-cent cigars and lived in a semi-luxurious apartment on the avenue. Freddie knew his mother didn't approve of her brother-in-law and from a very early age realized it had to do with Uncle Angelo's business. When he was much older he would learn of organized crime, but in his younger years Freddie knew only that his uncle was part of the Glenwood Gang, something spoken of in hushed voices by children in the neighborhood and never mentioned at all by grownups.

Sometimes his uncle would slip a dollar bill into Freddie's hand when they were alone. mussing up the boy's hair, he'd say, "Go buy yourself a present from your Uncle Angie, Kid, but don't tell your mama." Freddie would keep the secret, feeling guilty. He'd usually take a younger brother or sister

with him to the corner confectionery for an unaccustomed treat.

Freddie was nine when Uncle Angelo was gunned down on the sidewalk as he walked to his car in front of the Fredoni house. The barrel of the shotgun being pulled inside the dark blue sedan as it sped away with tires squealing was permanently engraved on the young boy's mind. So was the sight of his uncle's torn body. Freddie, fifty yards away, had been running toward him when the shots were fired. A dollar bill was clutched in his uncle's hand.

Word circulated quickly through the neighborhood. It was the Maple Hill Mob, they whispered on the streets and in the small stores and dreary bars in Glenwood. Years later Freddie would understand that it was the opening fusillade in a territorial war that flourished briefly on the east side and then died as suddenly as it began. At the time he knew only that he hated crime and hated criminals.

His feelings about crime remained unchanged but his opinion of those involved mellowed in the years after high school as longtime friends drifted into the Glenwood Gang. Boyhood dreams of being fire fighters, baseball players or astronauts died early in the neighborhood. They were replaced by the reality of the auto plant assembly lines, the steel mills down in the flats or, for some, the Glenwood Gang.

The morning after the stakeout, his huge body quivering with indignation, Bolka protested as promised when told he and Fredoni would be back at the same stand that evening.

"It'll be your last night," a young, tense assistant manager assured them, "regardless of how long the assignment goes on."

Bolka grunted in annoyance when each of them was handed another unpopular task, checking out an applicant for the agency's guard department. It was a two- or three-hour job and the result was a foregone conclusion; if the applicant was breathing and didn't have a police record, he qualified. The pay was too low to set the standards higher.

"That leaves the whole afternoon to kill," Bolka complained, leaning forward in his chair and drumming the fat fingers of one hand on the assistant manager's desk. "How about a theater check?"

The assistant manager, always intimidated by Bolka, shuffled the papers on his desk, mumbled, "We don't have one scheduled until tomorrow."

Bolka extended his hand. "Give it to me," he said. I'll do it today and date it tomorrow."

"You know we're not supposed to do that," the assistant manager whined, but he made no effort to retrieve the assignment sheet Bolka had snatched from his hand.

Bolka grunted again, folded the paper and put it in his jacket pocket. It amounted to little more than getting paid for watching a free movie.

Fredoni laughed inwardly at Bolka's heavy-handed domination of the assistant manager. He was content himself with having the afternoon free. The license numbers in his notebook were on his mind although he would have been at a loss to explain why. Something about the casual way the man and woman seemed to flaunt their affair irritated him. Their meetings should have been furtive, clandestine, but to Fredoni it appeared that their big, expensive cars, their money, made them feel superior to that sort of thing. They were arrogant about it, and he detested arrogance.

A clerk at the main police station, a shapely, auburn-haired woman of thirty or so, supplied the information he wanted. She handed him two file cards on which she had written names and addresses, snickered and said, "Don't tell me my doctor's in trouble."

Fredoni glanced at the name on the top card: Phillip Carey, M.D.

"Just checking an insurance claim," he said. "Do you know him?"

"Not really, but I went to his office a few times a year ago. He has the biggest weight-control program in the city and I wanted to lose a few pounds."

Fredoni's gaze began at her an-

kles and moved upward. From where, he wondered. "Then you do know him," he said.

"Well, I saw him for a minute or two each time, if that's what you mean, but I don't really know him. It's the kind of place where you give your name to the receptionist, wait your turn and then just tell the doctor you want to lose weight. A nurse gives you a packet of pills on your way out."

"No examination or anything?"

"He weighs you," she said, "but that's about it."

Fredoni thanked her and walked out, seething inside. Legalized dope peddling, he thought. Kids on the street get sent up for it, but if you have a diploma on the wall it's okay.

In the lobby he lit a cigarette and looked at the second card. Ralph L. Brown. The owner of the Continental lived in an exclusive suburb a few miles from the drug store. He walked into another office, opened a city directory on the counter, and turned to the B's. He studied one listing a moment, flipped the book shut and walked out. Brown was shop manager of an auto manufacturer's local stamping plant. His wife's name was Margaret.

The library of the city's morning newspaper was Fredoni's next stop. The librarian, a thin spinster without makeup, hair in a tight bun and wearing large, round glasses, was, like the clerk at the police station, a cultivated ac-

quaintance. Her files often were very useful to him. After a minute or two of preliminary conversation she asked, "What can I help you with today, Mr. Fredoni?"

"Ralph L. Brown and his wife, Margaret," he said. "Know them?"

"That would be Maggie Brown, I believe. Very active socially and in charitable work. Let me get the file."

"See if you have one on Dr. Phillip Carey while you're back there."

She did, a thin one. A few honors, mention of the usual medical organizations, a story announcing Carey's plans to build an office complex several years earlier. He was married and had two children.

Brown's envelope was jammed with clippings, thanks to Maggie. She apparently was involved in any project likely to get her name in the paper. There were a few business-related clippings on Brown but his major role, if newspaper lineage meant anything, was escorting Maggie to an endless round of charity balls, theater openings and celebrity get-togethers.

Fredoni repeated the insurance claim story to the librarian, thanked her, gave the hoped-for up-and-down appraisal while she smiled self-consciously and patted the back of her hair, and then left.

Outside again, he stood contemplating his next move, ignoring a cold, misty rain and savoring the

fresh air. He had found out all he wanted to know. There was no reason to return to the office, it was too early to go back to the drug store but too late to bother driving to his dingy, furnished apartment. He fingered the loose change in his pocket, decided he could afford one beer if he ate only a sandwich for supper, and dodged traffic to get to a bar across the street.

He nursed the beer, making it last as long as possible because he had nothing to do and nowhere to go. His thoughts were bitter, right in tune with the dark, lowering sky outside. A couple of winners, he said to himself. A quack who pockets a fortune peddling pills to unhappy housewives so they can get high on the amphetamines and a broad who blows her husband's money as fast as he can make it and still isn't satisfied.

His increasingly black moods were beginning to bother him. He had to do something to snap out of it, he knew, but he had no idea what it would be. Bust your butt, he thought, and still barely make it from paycheck to paycheck. His agency salary was pathetically low and they even took advantage of the investigators on expenses, expecting them to drive their cars but paying only bus fare to and from downtown.

He had been considering going on secret, what they called an undercover assignment on TV or in detective stories. It meant working

in a factory, a warehouse, a packing plant, but on secret you kept your full paycheck from the job plus receiving half your agency salary. He hated secrets, though. It was alway some menial, boring, back-breaking job and usually meant playing stool pigeon. Still, he had to do something. Like having the state issue him a license to steal, he thought angrily. But Glenwood High hadn't handed out the right kind of diploma.

"Hi, kid," Bolka said as he walked into the drug store at the precise moment a nearby church bell began tolling six o'clock. "God, I don't know if I can take another night of this or not."

"At least it's the last one," muttered Fredoni. How, he wondered, did his partner support a wife and two children, drive a late model car and maintain a house in a pretty decent neighborhood on his agency pay? Maybe he really did do a little shaking down. On the other hand, Bolka didn't impress him as sharp enough to pull it off.

Still treating it lightly, Fredoni told Bolka about the doctor and his lover. He decided to test the big man. "It would be a snap to muscle them for a little," he said. "They wouldn't miss it, that's for sure."

"That's risky stuff you're talking about, kid," Bolka said, shaking his head. "You could get killed that way."

"You could this way, too," Fre-

doni replied curtly, jerking his head in the direction of the phone booths.

Bolka looked at them. "Yeah," he said, "you've got a point there."

The hours dragged by again, even-more slowly than the first two nights. The rain had gotten heavier and then became mixed with snow so even the customers stayed away. It allowed too much time for thinking. Fredoni, as the interminable minutes ticked away, grew increasingly distraught. His problems seemed like a vise, squeezing him until he wanted to cry out against the injustices life handed out.

Bolka, who had spent most of the evening in the pharmacist's enclosure reading confession magazines off the rack, shuffled along the corridor as the end of the shift neared. Fredoni turned as he approached. He laughed, but there was little mirth in it.

"Not even a Dr. Carey to liven it up tonight," he said. Then, without realizing he was going to, he added, "Damn, I'd like to shake that SOB down a little."

"Too risky, Freddie," Bolka said. "You'd be out on the street if the agency found out. You might even wind up behind bars or, like I said, get yourself killed."

"I know it," Fredoni snarled. "I'm just talking, you know that."

Bolka gave him a long, penetrating look. "Sure, kid," he said softly. "Sure."

A WEEK PASSED before they met again while waiting for assignments one morning in the office. It had been several days of mental turmoil for Fredoni.

"Had anything interesting lately?" Bolka asked.

"Nothing," Fredoni replied. "God, it's been slow. They even had me out practicing surveillances one afternoon. I practiced on a guy sitting at a bar."

Bolka chuckled. "Good thinking, kid," he said. "It's been quiet for me, too. Don't let it get to you."

Crap, thought Fredoni. Seeing Bolka again had added to his tension. He walked to the lone window in the investigators' room, studied the traffic seven floors below for a few minutes and then slumped down in a chair at the opposite end of the room from Bolka. He studied the big man out of the corners of his eyes. Bolka had taken off his overcoat. His suit was well tailored, his shirt collar crisp, his black shoes expensive.

*How the hell does he do it? Fredoni asked himself. He has to be knocking down on the side. I wonder . . . has the big slob gone ahead and put the touch on the doctor after all his talk about it being too risky? If he has, it means it isn't his first shakedown.*

It was on his mind the rest of the day. Finally, alone in his apartment late in the evening, he reached a decision. He would call Carey

himself. If Bolka had been there before him the doctor was certain to give it away.

Fredoni didn't realize it, but it was the excuse he had subconsciously been seeking. He wouldn't be shaking anyone down — the word blackmail was too dirty, it was blocked from his mind — but checking to see if a fellow investigator was nothing but a crook masquerading as a detective.

Convincing the receptionist that she should put his call through to the doctor was no problem for someone accustomed to the daily use of pretexts. This time, however, his palms and upper lip were sweating. There was a short delay, a click, then a brusque voice saying, "Doctor Carey."

Fredoni cleared his throat, hesitated, finally said hoarsely, "I have something important to discuss with you, doctor. Because of its nature I think we should talk alone after your office hours."

"Out of the question," snapped Carey. "I never do it. Either tell me your business now or make an appointment with my receptionist."

"It would be to your advantage to do it my way, Doc," Fredoni said. He felt sure of himself again. Carey's high-handed attitude infuriated him. Slowly, so the words would sink in, he said, "I'm sure Maggie Brown would agree with me."

There was a lengthy pause be-

fore Carey said, "What did you say?"

"You heard me, Doc."

Another pause and then, "All right, come at seven o'clock. Knock on the outer door."

"Fine, Doctor. See you at seven." Fredoni replaced the receiver, smiling.

It was so simple. One thousand dollars. Back in his shabby apartment he counted it again, spreading the bills out on a wobbly kitchen table. They were small denominations, soiled, untraceable. He had pulled the figure out of the air and the doctor, without argument, had taken the money from a safe concealed in a closet off his main treatment room.

Carey had turned out to be exactly what Fredoni expected. He studied him closely, first as they talked briefly in the doctor's inner office and then as Carey crouched over the small safe. The doctor impressed Fredoni as the composite of all the things he had grown to detest in recent months. He was handsome but in a characterless, insubstantial way that marked him as a person who never had been forced to cope with real adversity. He was a product of indulgent parents, wealthy suburbs, exclusive schools and luxurious country clubs. Life as it was lived in Glenwood would be totally alien to him, completely beyond his comprehension and therefore, in his mind, inferior.

The doctor, to Fredoni, was like many of the agency's clients; self-centered, greedy, dishonest, but dishonest in a socially acceptable way. He didn't burglarize houses, he didn't enter stores with a gun in his hand and a mask on his face, he didn't belong to organized crime's hierarchy, but still, in Fredoni's mind, he was as crooked as any of those who did. The only difference was that Carey, through no doing of his own, had been born into a way of life that made the other things unnecessary.

Fredoni saw greed, selfishness, a man weak because of the very things he believed made him strong. What Fredoni overlooked was the latent threat of a man accustomed to having his own way when he felt his secure world endangered.

Carey had asked no questions, not even the name of his visitor, so Fredoni — Tony Wells if a name were needed — had one of his own. "Anything like this ever happen before, Doc?" he asked.

"Certainly not." Carey paused in counting the money, fixed Fredoni with a cold stare. "And it better not again."

"Don't worry, Doc, it's a one-shot deal."

"I really hope you mean that." Carey emphasized each word.

Fredoni made certain he wasn't followed when he left the office and walked to his car parked in a shopping center several blocks away. God, he thought, it was so

easy. Guilt deep within him was buried by a sense of elation, of power. It was justice, really. The doctor deserved it.

Maggie Brown saw no justice in the way Carey abruptly ended their affair. She was furious, more so because he didn't even offer an explanation. Her reaction convinced Carey she had not been contacted by the blackmailer. He made his plans accordingly.

Fredoni meant it when he told Carey he would not return for more. Had he been honest with himself he would have known better. He was familiar with the base motives that make work for private detectives and he was well aware that greed ranks as a prime mover. He had never crossed the line before, but, once the first step is taken, it is easier to go ahead than turn back.

The money merely whetted his appetite for more. It went fast: a couple of suits, a few shirts, a pair of shoes, some work on his car, dinners at decent restaurants for a change. It had seemed like so much and suddenly it was gone.

He thought of approaching Maggie Brown but rejected the idea. Women were too emotional, unpredictable. When he called Carey the second time, guilt smoldered inside Fredoni. He could no longer pretend that he was checking on a fellow investigator but he still fooled himself by thinking of it as a shakedown. The real word for

it remained blocked from his mind.

The same arrangements were made for the second meeting. As soon as Carey was alone in his office he began preparations according to plan. He took a heavy wrench from the supply room toolbox and put it in his jacket pocket. An injection was prepared in the treatment room and a thirty-eight revolver was transferred from a locked cabinet in his private office to the center drawer of his desk. Finished, he leaned back in his chair, lit a cigarette, and waited.

"Hi, Doc," Fredoni said when Carey let him in. Without speaking the doctor locked the door again and led the way directly to the treatment room. Cabinets lined one wall of the large room that contained an examination table, several wheeled tables loaded with paraphernalia, a cot and three chairs.

"Sit down," Carey said, indicating a chair near the center of the room with a toss of head. He walked behind it to the door of the closet where the safe was hidden.

Fredoni was uncomfortable, embarrassed by what he was doing. It was a voluntary act but it wasn't something he relished. Only the result — the money — was enjoyable.

He started to turn in his chair, said, "Look, Doc — " He halted in mid-sentence, drew back hastily. Not in time, though, to avoid the wrench. Carey's blow was aimed

at his right temple but Fredoni's sudden move caused the wrench to glance off his shoulder. He jumped to his feet in a crouched position, swinging at the same time.

The off-balance punch caught the side of Carey's jaw. He stumbled backward, caught himself, lunged again toward the smaller man. Fredoni warded off the second swing of the wrench with his left forearm and aimed another punch at the doctor's midsection. It hit with little force at the same instant Carey's wrench connected with the left side of the detective's forehead. The blow wasn't solid but it was enough to drop Fredoni to his knees. Carey let go of the wrench and delivered a knockout punch with his fist.

The doctor stood still a moment, inhaling deeply. His script hadn't been followed but the result was as good, he decided. Better, perhaps. With Fredoni out, he returned to his original plan. The injection was administered and then, grasping Fredoni under both arms, Carey dragged him to the nearest wall and propped him against it in a sitting position. The doctor, kneeling in front of Fredoni, struck him several more times with his fist, loosened his necktie and ripped open the top button of his new Van Heusen shirt.

Carey then went to work on himself. Fredoni's blow made it easier. It had scraped the skin on the side of his jaw so redness and a

slight swelling were visible. When satisfied with his own appearance, Carey began upsetting and breaking things until it appeared a wild melee had taken place in the room. He then went into his adjoining private office and did the same.

The next step was the hardest. Carey selected a sharp knife from a tray of instruments and, without allowing himself time to think about it, thrust it into his left arm below and to the outside of the elbow. He cried out involuntarily, withdrew the blade and placed the knife back on the table with only the handle touching the surface.

The doctor then lifted Fredoni to his feet and half dragging, half carrying the unconscious man, took him into the private office. With considerable difficulty Carey braced the detective against one of end of the desk, supporting him with his left hand. With his right hand he opened the desk drawer and picked up the gun.

Still holding Fredoni's right arm with his left hand, Carey carefully gauged the angle. His hand was shaking when he squeezed the trigger but his aim was true. Fredoni jerked violently and that, along with the unexpected loudness of the shot in the small room, caused Carey to release his grip. A red stain was spreading across the left side of his tan shirt when Fredoni's lifeless body hit the floor.

Carey paused only a moment to look at the result of his work. He walked quickly into the treatment

room, picked up the knife, wiped several spots of blood from the floor with his handkerchief, returned to his office, cleaned the knife handle and carefully placed it in his victim's right hand. He ticked things off in his mind, made a hasty survey of the two rooms and then, satisfied he had overlooked nothing, called the police.

"We had a real fight when I wouldn't give him what he wanted," Carey said to conclude his story to a slender, small-featured homicide detective. "If I hadn't been able to get to the gun I don't know how it would have ended. He was sky high, strong as an ox for a man his size. It's reaching the point where a doctor doesn't dare keep drugs in his office."

"Ummm," murmured Lieutenant Rubin Steinmetz. He stroked his pencil-line mustache with one finger and to himself thought, *Bull!* The story was phony. He didn't say so but Carey could read it in his face.

The autopsy revealed the presence of the drug and the entry and exit wounds were consistent with the doctor's story. Carey's own wound was one that might have been suffered by a man attempting to ward off a knife thrust but still Steinmetz knew it all was contrived, a hoax. He also knew he couldn't prove it.

Carey was smiling to himself as he walked away from a brief coroner's inquest several days later.

Justifiable was the ruling, as he knew it would be. Self defense. Even Steinmetz's steady, penetrating stare, obviously intended to let Carey know the case wasn't closed in his mind, didn't disturb the doctor.

He arrived at his office, closed since the shooting, shortly after workmen finished cleaning up and replacing the bloodstained carpet. Carey unwrapped a cigar, sat down and leaned back in his big desk chair, lit the cigar and exhaled a cloud of smoke.

"Perfect," he said aloud. "Just perfect." He was content, relaxed, self-satisfied. He propped his feet on the desk, stared at the ceiling and to himself thought: *Steinmetz didn't buy the story but it's all instinct on his part. There's not a damn thing he can do about it. So much for Mister Blackmailer — it's all over and done with.*

The ringing of the telephone jarred Carey from his reverie. He debated whether to answer it, decided there was no reason not to.

"Good job, Doctor," said the deep voice on the other end of the line. "You didn't fool Steinmetz, you know, but he's helpless unless something new breaks for him."

Carey dropped his feet to the floor, straightened up in the chair, let the cigar fall into an ashtray. "Who is this?" he said huskily.

"Just a mutual friend. Of yours and Freddie's, that is. Oh, and Maggie, of course." The words

were followed by a humorless chuckle.

Stunned, Carey gripped the edge of the desk with his free hand. The room was spinning around before his eyes. Finally, after a long delay, he said, "What do you want?"

"I think we need to reach some sort of agreement, don't you, Doctor?"

"What do you mean, agreement?"

"Nothing of consequence to a man of your position. Say five hundred a month. Cash. In small, used, unmarked bills. Mailed the first of every month to John Jones, Box 1347, at the main post office."

"I don't know . . . ." Carey's voice trailed away. He couldn't believe it was happening.

"Yes you do, Doctor. Remember Steinmetz. If he had the link connecting you with —"

"Okay, okay," interrupted Carey. "We'll do as you say."

"I knew you were a reasonable man, Doctor. Now there's one more thing. Just in case you'd think of trying to track me down through the post office box or some other way, there's something you should know. Half an hour ago I deposited with my attorney a sealed envelope to be opened in the event of my death. An inner envelope is addressed to Steinmetz and I think you know what it contains. Keep in mind there is no statute of limitation on murder."

"Just a minute," Carey stam-

mered. "What if you get hit by a truck or have a heart attack?"

"I guess that's something you'll just have to hope doesn't happen. Chalk it up to the risks of the business. Should make reading the obituaries an interesting guessing game for you, right?"

Bolka laughed aloud as he hung up the phone. Amateurs, he thought. Fredoni and Carey, a couple of amateurs. The big black-mailer and the man who committed the perfect murder. A couple of punks, that's all. They should have left such things to a real pro.

He was still laughing when he stepped from the booth into the corridor as a youth ripped the receiver from a phone several booths away.

"Hey, punk!" Bolka shouted. "I mean you, kid!"

He lunged at the vandal, collaring him just as a second youth stepped from a booth behind Bolka and delivered a crushing blow to his head with a section of iron pipe.

The crowd gathered quickly. A man wearing a pharmacist's jacket bent over, looked at Bolka's face and said, "That's one of the private detectives that was here a few weeks ago watching the phones. He must have come back on his own and caught somebody in the act."

"If he did, it was a mistake," said the man kneeling beside the body. "Better call the police — he's dead."

# Touch

by CHARLES E. FRITCH

The Man Was Incredibly Ugly, but His Hands Had a Certain Magic . . .

THE SAN FRANCISCO sky grew dark and a chilling fog crept into the city from the bay. Huddled in the back seat of the speeding taxi, Sandy Nelson shivered — but not with cold. Now, more than ever, she was having doubts about her mission to this city she'd never seen before.

When the taxi decelerated to a halt in a drab section of town, she panicked and almost told the driver to turn around and take her back to the bus station.

Except that her money was almost gone, and she had no bus fare back to Milwaukee.

She had no choice but to go on — no matter what her feelings were about this place.

"This is the address you gave me, miss," the cabbie told her impatiently. His expression eased as he saw her white, uncertain face. "You sure you want to go here?"

She wasn't certain at all. She looked again out the cab window at the dingy, timeworn brownstone looming ominously before her. The building was ancient and dirty

and to her fearful eyes it seemed to hold nameless terrors waiting to engulf her.

She shook her head and smiled. No, that was ridiculous. She would get out of the cab, calmly walk to the apartment house, knock on an unfamiliar door, and be reunited with the sister she hadn't seen all these years: a tearful, joyous reunion that would sweep away her fears and suspicions and bring renewed happiness to them both.

"Yes," she said, "yes, this is the place."

She dug into her purse, gave him the fare and a small tip. When she got out with her suitcase, the cab accelerated swiftly down the street and out of sight.

She turned to face the building. It did look grim at night, but she was sure that during the daytime it teemed with life and gaiety. Why else would Carol live in such a place, even with the man she loved?

Taking a deep breath, she walked up the concrete steps and through the windowed doorway in-

to a hallway. A naked bulb hung at the foot of an ascending flight of stairs. The light was dim, but she could read the fading names on the mailboxes set flush with the wall.

She breathed a sigh of relief. There it was: *Berko, B.* She was afraid Carol or her lover might have moved. But Berko was the name of the artist Carol had written about.

*He's not much on looks, her sister had written over six months ago, but he has the soul and the touch of an artist.*

Shifting her suitcase to the other hand, Sandy ascended the stairs, which creaked and groaned beneath each step. At the first landing there was another low wattage bulb and two doors labeled 2A and 2B. The next landing revealed two more doors, but the overhead bulb was out and she had to peer closely to see the door with the number 3B on it.

She set down the suitcase, reached out and knocked on the door.

Inside, some stirred. *Let it be Carol, she prayed silently.*

She knocked again, louder this time.

"Who's there?" a harsh voice demanded, annoyed.

Sandy's hopes fell. The voice was obviously not her sister's. "Sandy Nelson," she said.

A pause. Then a bolt slid back on the inside, and the door was cracked open, sending a shaft of

flickering light into the hallway. A man's dark figure regarded her suspiciously.

"Who did you say you were?" His voice was like a fingernail being drawn across a blackboard.

"Sandy Nelson. Are you Mr. Berko?"

His face was in darkness, but she felt his eyes piercing her. "What of it?"

"I'm looking for my sister Carol. I wrote her a letter telling her I was coming. Is she living here?"

"She's living here," he said. He opened the door wider. "All right, all right, come in. But hurry it up, so we don't lose any heat."

Before she could change her mind, she picked up her suitcase and walked into the room. The room was large but sparsely furnished. There were light fixtures, but the lights were not turned on. In the small fireplace a log burned brightly, sending out waves of flickering light and warmth across the wooden floor. A dingy skylight showed the stars.

The door closed behind her and the bolt was thrust home. An involuntary shiver shook her as she realized she was trapped. She wondered if she would be able to get the gun out of her purse in time.

"You're cold," he said. "I'll put more wood on the fire."

He shuffled past her, and Sandy was glad he didn't see her stifled gasp as she saw him more clearly

in the light. *Not much on looks* was not an apt description for the homely creature. His short, gnarled body was like a sack filled with potatoes. His hands were large, with long slender fingers whose backs were covered with hair. His face was flat, with a twisted nose and a small mouth that opened to show dingy teeth. Squinting eyes peered out through a tangle of unruly bristly black hair that tumbled over his forehead.

Looking at the man, Sandy felt physically ill. How could her sister live with this loathesome man?

"There," he said, stepping back from the fire upon which he'd slid a fresh log, "that should help."

The fire dimmed for a moment, then leaped into brilliance, crackling, filling the room with a fresh burst of heat and light.

The man shuffled close to her and peered intently at Sandy's face. "So you're her sister, eh?" It was a statement, not a question.

"Where is Carol?"

"Out," he said.

He stepped back and surveyed her, nodding thoughtfully. "Yes, you look very much like her. The same bone structure, the same texture of the skin, the same way of standing—"

"Out where?" Sandy asked.

"What?"

"You said Carol was out. Where did she go?"

He shrugged. "Sausalito, I think. I'm not sure."

"Will she be back soon?"

Another shrug. "She comes and she goes. I started a canvas of her. Would you like to see it?"

"Yes. Very much."

She followed him across the wooden floor of the studio to an easel covered with a dirty cloth.

He grasped one edge of the cloth and whisked it from the canvas. "There," he said proudly.

Sandy stared at the meaningless blob of colors. "It's — it's lovely," she said.

He grunted, pleased with her answer. "Anyone can draw an object as it looks to the eye. But I capture the soul." He sighed. "A pity I have not been able to finish it. But your sister is like the wind. She comes and she goes."

Sandy hesitated. "Would it help if I posed for you?"

He grinned crookedly. "Yes," he said. "You are so much like her. I could finish the painting with you."

He reached out to touch her cheek, but she drew back involuntarily before his lean fingers could reach her.

His hand dropped to his side. "I am an ugly man. I know that. When I walk the streets, children — even adults — laugh at me. Why would you pose for me?"

"Because my sister said you were a great artist," Sandy said, though she wondered about the splotched canvas, adding truthfully, "and because I want to see Carol again."

The painter nodded. "Of course. Perhaps she will return in the morning. You can sleep in her bed," he said, indicating a cot in one corner of the room, "while I shall sleep here by the fire."

She was repelled by the idea of sleeping in the same room with him. But her money was almost gone, with not enough left for a room for the night. Besides, she had the gun in her purse, if she needed it.

"But first," the man said, "let us have some wine. Then we will sleep, and in the morning you will pose for me."

He poured her and himself small glasses of wine and they sat in front of the fire. She began to feel more relaxed now, thanks to the man's disarming attitude, the warm fire soothing her chilled body, and the smooth red wine that coursed down her throat and into her welcoming stomach. As he sat watching her intently, she even smiled back at him. Now that the initial shock of seeing him had worn off, she could look at him without betraying her feelings. She thought of what he'd said about children laughing at him, and she felt a sudden compassion flood her.

She finished her wine, yawned, and told him she was going to sleep. She took her purse and her suitcase to the cot at the opposite end of the room, quickly slipped off her dress and pulled on a pair of pajamas from her meager

wardrobe. She climbed onto the uncomfortable cot and pulled the covers over her.

The artist had not even glanced in her direction. He was sitting on the floor, sipping wine, staring meditatively into the flickering fire.

Surreptitiously, she reached down and flicked open the catch of her purse. Now all she had to do was reach down into the opening to quickly get the loaded revolver. Then she relaxed and closed her eyes.

Hearing his movement, she slit-ted her eyes open to see him stirring up the fire. Then he lay in front of it and pulled a blanket over his body. Satisfied, she closed her eyes again and let the wine and the warmth from the fire take their effect.

SHE AWAKENED the morning bathed in sunlight streaming through the skylight. She glanced at the empty blanket beside the silent fireplace, then quickly raised herself to one elbow.

Berko was at his easel, painting furiously. He glanced in her direction and rasped, "I've got some water and instant espresso. And some doughnuts if you're hungry."

In the daylight he seemed more homely than sinister. It had been the fog and the flickering firelight that had made her suspicious, Sandy decided. Today Carol would show up — she was certain of it.

She eased herself from the uncomfortable cot, her body stiff and aching, and went into the small kitchenette to make herself a cup of steaming coffee. The doughnuts were stale and crumbly, but she was so hungry she wolfed them down. With a night's sleep and some food in her stomach, she began to feel sheepish about the whole business.

Back in Milwaukee, she'd imagined her sister's silence after the sporadic letters telling of Berko meant all sorts of evil things had befallen her. Now, in the cold light of day it seemed as though Carol had merely posed for a kookie artist and then gotten bored and taken off.

Still, she said she loved him — so perhaps she would be back. She glanced at Berko, who had not looked at her while he was struggling with his painting, and wondered how any girl could fall for the artist. He didn't seem as horrible now, but he was not the kind of person anyone would fall in love with.

When she finished eating, he said, "Would you like to pose for me now?"

She stretched, smoothing the kinks in her muscles. "Yes."

"Very well," he said matter-of-factly, then take off your clothes."

She froze in mid-stretch and stared at him. "What?"

"Your clothes, your clothes," he said, furrowing his eyebrows in

obvious annoyance. "Take them off. How can I paint you in the nude if you don't take your clothes off?"

She shook herself from her trance. "Of course," she said calmly.

This was ridiculous, she thought as she unfastened the buttons of her pajamas. I'm undressing in front of an absolute stranger. As Carol must have done innumerable times, she reminded herself. Yet why not? Berko was an artist, and she, like her sister, would model nude for him. To him she was not a woman; she was an object for him to see the and paint in multicolored blotches on the canvas.

She quickly removed all her clothing and folded it carefully over the back of a nearby chair. "Where shall I stand?"

"There," he told her, pointing with a brush, "in the sunlight."

She moved into the shaft of warm sunlight streaming through the tilted skylight, her skin tingling as he looked at her.

Berko nodded approval. "Nice bone structure. Nice skin. Just like your sister."

Strangely, his praise warmed her more than the morning sunlight.

They worked for the rest of the morning. Around noon they paused and had sandwiches which Sandy made from ingredients discovered in the tiny refrigerator in

one corner of the kitchenette. She didn't bother to cover herself, for it was warm in the studio, and after being exposed for so many hours any show of modesty now would be absurd.

She wondered where Carol was and if she would return to the studio as the artist claimed. If she didn't show up today, Sandy decided she would go out and look for the girl.

After lunch, they returned to work and didn't stop until late in the afternoon.

Sandy moved stiffly to her clothing. "I feel sore all over," she complained.

"You're not used to posing. We should have quit sooner," he said, "but you are so lovely, and I was so fired with enthusiasm. Ah! I know what will help you."

He moved toward her, his big hands extended, and Sandy felt a renewed fear chill her. She stared at his hairy hands, at the flexing fingers. She wanted to scream, to run before he touched her — but she was paralyzed with fright and horror.

But when he touched her, his fingers were soft and smooth and gentle. They traced a tingling pathway along her shoulders, gently kneading the skin, and she felt her tenseness vanishing like mist before the morning sun. She threw back her head and closed her eyes, feeling the stiffness receding, feeling warm and relaxed and comfortable once more.

*Berko has an artist's touch*, her sister Carol had written. Was this what she meant?

She was disappointed when his hands left her.

"Feel better?" he asked.

She nodded breathlessly. "Oh yes. Your hands are marvelously gifted."

He smiled, pleased.

Carol did not show up that day. *Tomorrow, Sandy promised herself, I will go hunting for her.*

That night as she lay on the cot in her corner of the room, she watched the ugly painter who slept huddled in a blanket by the fire. During one moment after she'd first seen him, she thought that maybe Carol had decided to leave the artist and Berko had killed her. But now she dismissed that notion. It was incredible, though, that such a grotesque creature should have the touch of an angel. She shivered in delight as she recalled how gentle his fingers were, and yet how stimulating.

She fell asleep thinking about it.

The next day she posed nude for him while he worked with a vengeance.

Late in the afternoon she said, "I feel tired. Will you massage me again?"

*What am I doing?* a small part of her mind cried out. But she squelched it with another part that remembered how wonderfully soothing his strong, slim fingers had felt on her.

"Yes," he said.

She lay on the cot. He kneeled beside her and took her shoulders in his huge hands and worked the fingers with gentle firmness into the flesh.

"I ache all over," she murmured, eyes closed. "All over."

She sensed his hesitation, but then his hands rippled down from her shoulders. He touched the slope of one breast, the fingertip gliding along the peak, then down along the creamy expanse of stomach that began to move as her breathing became rapid.

His hands played a fervent, soothing melody upon her flesh, bringing new life to her tired muscles. His fingertips were like tiny charges of electricity that made her skin tingle. She felt a familiar sensual warmth pervade her body, starting deep inside her and spreading through her limbs. Her breathing became ragged, her pulse pounded loudly in her ears, and she was suddenly overwhelmed with a desire to reach out and pull him down to her.

Until she opened her eyes and saw his homely, grotesquely intense face near her — and she laughed.

His face clouded with pain. He took his hands from her and rose. He said, "You had better leave."

"But the painting isn't finished."

He turned on her, snarling, "What does it matter? How can I look at you posing for me when I

know you are secretly laughing at my ugliness."

"I'm sorry, Berko, I really am," Sandy said, meaning it. She had to stay. There was no place to go, and her sister Carol might show up. It had been two days already. "Let me stay tonight, anyway. I'll leave in the morning."

"All right," he grumbled.

They had bowls of soup for dinner and later she went to bed, while he stayed in his usual place in front of the fire, his sad eyes regarding the flames.

Sandy lay awake, sorry she had insulted him. The touch of his hands was something she had never experienced before. As she thought of it, the memory made her skin tingle. All right, so he was ugly. In the dark, what did that matter?

And suddenly, the thought of never having him touch her again was too much to bear.

She silently threw off the covers, rose, stripped naked, walked across the room and lay beside him. He turned, his face expressionless.

She understood why he was still awake. "You knew I wouldn't be able to stay away, didn't you?"

He nodded. "You like to feel my hands on your body," he said in a matter of fact tone. "My touch soothes you and it excites you at the same time."

"Yes," she breathed, "Yes, oh yes!"

She found his hands and guided

them to her body, shivering as contact came. Instinctively, his hands moved, touching, touching, touching, while she writhed beneath the touch in a kind of animal ecstasy.

"You thought I had killed your sister," he said. "You had a gun in your purse you were going to use on me."

"I was wrong," Sandy moaned. "How could you hurt anyone? You're an artist? And those hands of yours — those wonderful, exciting hands —"

"Tell me you love me," he commanded.

A tremor of delight convulsed her. "I love you," she murmured.

"And tomorrow you'll laugh at me," he said sadly, "as your sister laughed at me."

"Oh no, never," she protested.

He smiled. "I will see to it that you don't."

His hands crept along her shoulders and around her neck. Her excitement was so intense she hardly noticed the hairy fingers closing, tightening with a sudden grip that swiftly crushed the life from her.

The next morning he lifted Sandy's body onto a chair in the morning sunlight. Her eyes were closed, her face a white mask. And she wasn't laughing at him any more. Now, he could finish the painting without interruption.

He worked feverishly until noon, when he ran out of paint and thinner. On the way down the

stairs he met a woman coming up, a paper bag filled with groceries in her arms.

"Ah, good morning, Mrs. Berko," he said, smiling crookedly.

Carol Berko gazed at him unperturbed. At one time the sight of her ugly neighbor had disgusted her, but now she could look at him as one of nature's more miserable mistakes and regard him impassionately.

"Some of the kids must be fooling around again," she told him. "The nameplates on the mailboxes have been switched."

"I'll fix them," he said as she brushed past him.

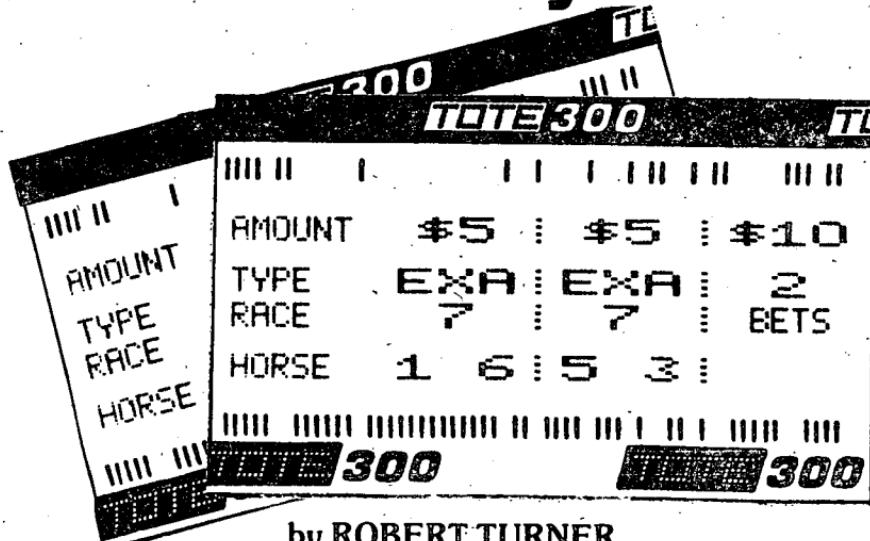
She paused. "By the way, I was expecting a letter from my sister, Sandy Nelson. You didn't get it by mistake, did you?"

"No," he lied.

A worried frown creased the woman's forehead; then she resumed her walk to the third floor. The artist smiled as he watched the bare white legs under the dress as she ascended. Yes, she was just like her sister. Too bad she didn't pose for him, a *real artist*, instead of that fool Berko, who painted things merely as they were seen by the eye.

He scurried down the stairs to the mailboxes, where he took the fading nameplate and replaced it on 3A where it belonged. Then, whistling, he shuffled out and down the sun-drenched street for supplies.

# Final Payoff



by ROBERT TURNER

Albert Schiller Figured Out a Wonderful Way to Get Even with His Shrew of a Wife. He Would Win a Lot of Money when His Horses Came in — and They Did!

SOME PEOPLE will say it was a dirty trick to play on a widow, but not if they knew Gertie Schiller. Her husband, Albert, would have wanted it the way it turned out, I'm sure. I knew Albert probably better than Gertie did. I was his best friend, maybe his only one. I knew how he hated that witch, and you couldn't blame him. She was probably one of the most loathesome harpies that a man ever had to put up with.

When strangers were around, she put on the big act, playing the loving, patient, attentive wife with the invalid husband. But

when they were alone, she would put that poor man through hell. I lived in the apartment next to them. The walls weren't too good and I often heard that shrill voice of hers when she was going at him real hard, screaming and cursing, telling him he was only half a man and she didn't know why she stayed with him.

"Albert, you dried-up, ugly old cripple," she would say, "why couldn't you have fallen out of that tree onto your head and broken your neck, instead of just your legs? Then I'd have been free of you and able to collect

the insurance money and buy myself an interest in a nice beauty shop and live comfortably and maybe marry again, to a whole man, a *real* man."

Preeningly, she would add: "I ain't really that bad-lookin', you know. Plenty of men give me the eye when I walk down the street. Lots of men *like* a woman with an ample figger like mine. I've been told, too, that the little gray in my hair is quite becomin', real distinguished like. But what good does it do me, as long as you're still alive?"

She would always finish up the same way. "Damn you, Albert, since you *didn't* die from that fall why can't you at least have the decency to have another heart attack — a fatal one, this time? You know you're overdue for it. It's been a year and a half now since the last one and the doc said it could happen again any time. But it doesn't. You just go on livin' — if you call it that. On and on and on. How inconsiderate can you be, Albert?"

He never answered her, never talked back anymore. Probably because that was what she wanted him to do. She was deliberately trying to rile him, work up his blood pressure, put what might be the final strain on his already weak heart, bring on a fatal coronary occlusion.

When I'd overhear her tirades, I could picture Albert sitting there

in the wheelchair, white, bony fingers gripping the arms of it, his slightly protruding, pale gray eyes behind their thick-lensed glasses, just looking at her, trying not to show any emotion at all.

He told me that the terrible voice of her, the things she said, still got to him, like a knife twisting in his gut, but he no longer let her know that, refused to give her the satisfaction. He just sat quietly and took it until she wore herself out.

The accident? Well, Albert had been a tree surgeon. He made a better than average living for years, which was probably why Gertie, considerably younger, married him. During the early years she was as happy, I suppose, as a woman of her type would ever be. They had a nice home and a good car and Gertie had money for clothes and visits to the beauty parlor.

Then Albert had his bad fall. He landed on his feet, but both legs were badly shattered and his spine was injured so that from then on he was partially paralyzed from the hips down. And the good life stopped for Gertie. The house and car had to be sold, their savings used to pay off the huge hospital bills.

Their only income then came from Social Security disability payments and enough from Welfare, added to that, so that they could live in a small, cheap apart-

ment, buy a few hand-me-down clothes at rummage sales and have enough to eat to keep them alive.

Albert knew that Gertie wouldn't have stuck it out for a minute except for the fact that if she didn't she would have to go to work and the very word was anathema to her. Then, too, while Albert was in the hospital they discovered that he had a bad heart condition. Shortly after he returned home, he suffered a severe heart attack, which was almost fatal. That alone was enough to keep Gertie hanging around.

There would probably be another, the doctor told her, and it could happen at any time. Gertie could hardly hide her jubilance at this news, Albert said. He had a paid-up life insurance policy in the amount of ten thousand dollars.

With money like that, Gertie told Albert, she wouldn't have to work for a living. She could put a down payment on a small beauty salon, let somebody else run it for her and live comfortably on the profits. Almost any beauty parlor in a good location had to be a money-maker, she said.

The only trouble was, Albert didn't suffer another attack. Nothing Gertie could do seemed to provoke it. Which was why, I'm sure, she endured my friendship with Albert and didn't try to discourage his hobby. She figured that at some time or other the excitement might induce the fatal

seizure she had been so impatiently waiting for.

What Gertie *didn't* know was that after a while, it became no longer just a hobby for Albert. Handicapping and playing the horses on paper just for the fun of it, after the first few weeks, was not enough for him. He had to actually start betting on them. I did everything to discourage him, but to no avail.

You see, I'm a dyed-in-the-wool, incorrigible horse player. For me, it's not bad. I'm not married. I have a good job. I don't blow the rent or grocery money: I play sensibly. I don't bowl or go the golf or poker route. Playing the races, next to dating cute chicks, is my only fun.

I've learned as much about betting on the horses as is humanly possible. I mean, I don't just guess or play hunches or follow the chalk or buy tip sheets from touts. I do my own handicapping. I know the past performance charts in the *Daily Racing Form* and use them the same way a mechanic uses an automotive manual. Sometimes I lose, sometimes I win. Over an average year, perhaps I'll lose a thousand or win one but whichever, I get a million dollars worth of action and that's the name of the game for me. Golf or bowling, if you play for money, can cost you as much or more.

It doesn't interfere with my job, either. I work the eleven p.m.

to seven a.m. shift at the Plant. After work, I hit the sack until about noon, spend the afternoon at the track, come home and grab a few more hours of sleep and then hit out on the town until it's time to go to work again.

I tell you all this because, when I first met Albert and started rapping with him and he found out about the kind of life I live, it turned him on. I guess I became like a hero figure or something to him. He said if he had his life to live over again, that would be exactly what he'd like to do.

Then one day he found out there was a local radio station that played a delayed tape rerun of each race. He started picking horses from the entries listed in the newspaper and then checked his selections in the actual running of the races on the radio. He picked a winner that very first day and he told me it was one of the most exciting things that had ever happened to him. He was hooked from then on.

For a week or so he was content just to play on paper. Then one noontime, on my way to the races, I saw Albert in his wheelchair, sitting in the opened doorway of his apartment. He had a big grin on his face and a gleam in his eyes I'd never seen before. He crooked his finger at me.

"Jay," he said almost breathlessly. "Come on in a minute."

"Where's Gertie?" I asked. We didn't get along too well.

I avoided her whenever possible.

"Out. Went to the hairdresser's. Come in, come in, Jay."

He wheeled the chair inside and over to the dinette table, on which the local paper was opened to the racing section. As usual he had a horse checked off in each race.

"I want you to do me a favor," he said. "Would you put in some bets for me at the track?"

When I hesitated, he looked crestfallen. "I mean, well, if it's too much trouble, Jay, I wouldn't want you to."

"It isn't that, buddy," I said. "I just want to make sure you know what you're doing, you're sure you want to risk losing your money. You know, betting the ponies on paper and putting out cash at the track are two different things."

"I know, I know. I have a feeling, a feeling I'm going to be lucky today. I'm only going to invest ten bucks. Two dollars each on the first five races. Will you put the bets in for me?"

My expression must have given away what I was thinking. Grinning, showing his yellowing, crooked teeth, he said: "You're wondering how I managed to grab onto a ten-spot without Gertie knowing, huh?"

"Well, it's none of my business, Albert," I said.

He chuckled. "Sure it is. You probably get as much of a bang

out of my putting one over on old Gertie as I do. Lemme tell you what I did. Gertie asked me to clean out an old desk we have in the bedroom. While I was doing that, I came across a small stamp collection I'd started as a kid. That gave me the idea. I've been thinking and thinking, trying to figure some way to get a few bucks that Gertie wouldn't know about so I could actually try betting on some races."

"Okay," I said. "You sold the stamp collection."

"Yeah. Old man Burton, who lives down in 1-A, y'know, is a stamp nut. So when Gertie was out, yesterday, I called him on the phone and asked him to run up and see if he'd be interested in buying any of my stamps. Of course he told me that most of the stuff was junk and there were only about five stamps that he didn't have and might be interested in. He said they weren't too much but he'd given me five dollars for them. Anyhow, I told him I wanted fifteen and we finally settled for ten."

He reached into a pocket and took out a ten-dollar bill and a little slip of paper on which he'd written the names of his five horses.

"Here's the money and a list of my horses. Jay, you don't know how much bigger a kick it's going to be for me, listening to the race results, if I've actually got a bet going."

I stuck the bill and the paper

into the pocket of my shirt. "If you win, how'm I going to get the money to you without Gertie knowing?"

He gave me a conspiratorial grin. "You don't. If I win, keep the winnings and I'll just keep playing as long as it lasts, okay? You can stop by tomorrow, just like to say hello or something, and I'll slip you a small piece of paper with my tomorrow's selections . . . That is, if I win, of course."

"Okay, partner," I told him. "Now I'd better get out of here before Gertie gets back. Good luck, Albert."

"You, too, Jay," he said. "Maybe both of us will have a good day."

ON THE WAY to the track I didn't think too much about it. Chances were Albert would blow the ten bucks. That would smarten him up and that would be the end of it.

I forgot about Beginner's Luck. Albert picked two winners that day for a profit of over twenty-four dollars above his original ten-dollar investment.

That night after I got home I waited and watched out the window until I saw Gertie leave for her nightly visit to the corner market. She always went about the same time, Albert told me, there was a manager that came on that shift she liked to jive around with. Gertie thought he was cute, she told Albert, and there really

wasn't anything wrong with a little innocent flirtation. Although, she always added, if she was free, there could very well be more to it than that. The man was single and always telling her that any time she wanted to get rid of her husband, he'd love to have a good-looking dame like her around.

Anyhow, when I went over to Albert's he was as ecstatic as though he'd won the Irish Sweepstakes.

"Hey, cool it, pal," I told him. "It's only twenty-four bucks. You're not supposed to get too excited. Remember that ticker of yours, huh?"

"Aw," he answered, patting his chest. "This kind of excitement will never hurt me. I feel better than I have in years. How about that, huh? Two winners out of five? Not bad for an amateur, eh?"

"You did all right. I had that one you had in the seventh, too. Twenty bucks on it pulled me out of the hole for the day." I grinned at him. "Maybe I ought to let you handicap me, too."

He laughed and waved deprecatingly. "Nah. I just got lucky. I'll probably blow the whole thing tomorrow and then I'll be through . . . Hey, you should have heard Gertie when I was listening to the races and heard my two winners coming in. You know how she is, Jay, she hates me listening to the damned thing, anyhow. The voice of the guy call-

ing the races drives her nuts. And the way he uses the same words with each race. Y'know, like: The flag is *up!* . . . And *there* they go! . . . *Going* to the front, that's . . . and like that.

"The first time I listened to the races she raised hell, but then when she saw how excited I got when a horse I picked won or was even in the money, I guess she figured maybe it was a good deal and one of these days I'd have another attack and keel over and she'd be free.

"So, this afternoon, with money running on the races, I *really* was rooting for my selections. She didn't know that, of course, but sensed that something was different. When she asked me, I told her I was having a little fun contest with you, Jay, to see who could pick the most winners every day. And you know what she said?"

"Uh-huh."

"She said, 'Honestly, Albert, you and that horse-playing bum of a friend, how can you get so excited about a bunch of animals running around in a circle?' . . . Ain't that funny, Jay? It's exactly what she said. Then, she says, 'And you're worse than he is, Albert, just playing for fun. How can a grown man be so childish?'

"I almost broke up at that. If she'd know I won twenty-four bucks or even that I'd latched on to ten that she didn't know about,

she'd have a fit. Then she quickly added that she really didn't mind since I seemed to get such a kick out of it. What she *really* meant was that the more excited I got the better the chance she had of getting her wish that I'd drop dead. But I'm goin' to fool her, Jay. For the first time since I married her, I'm enjoying myself. And putting one over on her. I'm not about to die and spoil the whole thing."

We yakked a little longer and then I left, promising to stop by on my way to the track the next day and pick up Albert's selections.

THAT NEXT DAY, his horses lost four dollars, leaving him still ahead of the game. After that, in addition to individual bets, Albert started playing the Exacta in the ninth race. This consists of trying to pick the winning and second horse in exact order. A ticket cost five dollars, but the payoff sometimes is in four figures. It should be. It's tough enough to try to pick a winner, let alone the second horse, too.

The second time Albert played the Exacta he got lucky, and lucky's the word when you hit an Exacta. He was using a "system," which is fairly common. He bet the numbers of his age, which happened to be sixty-one. Well, the six and one Exacta paid off on Albert's second try. Not a huge one but fairly substantial. He

got back a hundred and forty-four dollars for his five-dollar ticket. To Albert, it was like a million. It stretched his bankroll so that he could continue to play for quite some time, if he only bet ten or fifteen dollars a day.

Of course, he didn't do that. He had the fever now. He continued to play his "system" on the Exacta even though I advised against it. Soon he was doubling his bets on it, buying two tickets. He still stretched it out pretty well. It was a little over two weeks before he was broke.

I figured that was the end of it. He'd had his fling, found out you can't beat the horses. Now he'd go back to playing them on paper or even forget the whole thing. For a week he did that, and of course, the inevitable happened; the Goddess of Luck really gave him a workout. He picked big winners almost every day and would have made over a thousand dollars profit for the week — if he had had money riding on them.

He got pretty uptight about this. He told me, cussing, something Albert seldom did, that if it could happen once it could happen again. He was going to get another bankroll somewhere. I didn't pay too much attention.

Where would he get it?

A couple of days later Albert was in the doorway waiting for me when I came back from the races. Gertie was on her daily visit to the supermarket. Albert

wore a grin that looked as though it was about to split his face.

"Jay! Jay!" he said, voice trembling. "I'm back in business. But big this time!"

"What do you mean?"

"You're going to play my horses at the track for me again. I got a new bankroll, a big one, and I'm going for broke this time."

"Yeah?"

He yanked a wallet from his pocket, opened it and dug into an inner compartment, pulled out a folded check, and held it out to me. I looked at it and whistled long and low. The check was made out to Albert Schiller from an insurance company and the amount was close to \$7,000.

"I cashed in my paid-up life insurance policy," he said.

"Crazy," I said. "But what about Gertie?"

"She won't know. It was *my* policy. I could do what I wanted with it. She was only the beneficiary."

I handed the check back to him he waved it away. "No, you keep it, Jay. It's already endorsed. Deposit it for me at your bank — put it in a separate account if you like, so it won't foul up your regular one. Then take out money to play my selections at the track every day. I'm going to start off playing a hundred a day — every day."

"Oh, no!" I said.

He gave me a wry grin. "Oh yeah. I've got a goal set, Jay.

I'm going to make it or go broke trying."

"What kind of goal?"

"I've always wanted to travel. I want to take a boat trip around the world and then spend the rest of my life in some quiet foreign country where the weather is nice all year around and where you can live cheap on the American dollar."

"You're still forgetting Gertie."

He put his fist to his lips and made a rude noise. "How can she stop me? I'll be rid of her. She can't touch me, outside of the U.S.A., and I won't need her any more. They got doctors and nurses on ocean liners. In that foreign country I'll get a live-in house-keeper cheap. I figure about twenty thousand bucks will do it for me. I'm going to run that insurance money up to that amount, playing the horses."

"Suppose you don't, man? Your luck could run bad. You could blow the whole thing in a couple of months. Maybe less."

He shrugged. "So? At least I will have tried to make my dream come true. And Gertie will never get her hands on that money and when I do pop off, I'll go happy, knowing she'll be expecting to collect ten thousand and thinking what her face will look like when she learns there is no insurance money, that I blew it. Knowing that, she'll have to get off her fat rear and finally go out and work for a living. I've thought

it all out, Jay. I've made up my mind."

I tried to talk him out of it. I asked him how he knew I wouldn't run off with his money? He laughed and told me that I was his friend and he trusted me. In the end when he began begging, I had to say okay.

There were nine races every day. Albert bet ten bucks on a horse in each race, plus two five-dollar tickets on the Exacta in the ninth, using his old six and one "system."

"If it can happen once, it can happen again," he told me.

Sure it could, but I wouldn't want to hold my breath, waiting.

Days, weeks, and a couple of months went by. Albert won some days, lost on others. His bankroll dwindled steadily but he never lost faith. When he had a couple of good winning days he was exuberant. When he'd hit a losing streak, it didn't seem to bother him too much.

When he was pretty deep into his last thousand dollars, in the last race one day, I had a nag named *Circumspect*. It stumbled coming out of the gate, dropped back to last by about ten lengths. I kissed my bet goodbye and started watching the two horses Albert had in the Exacta. The six horse, *Pinchme*, took the lead by about three lengths and held it right on into the stretch. At the eighth pole, the one horse,

*Barbeebabee*, rushed up between horses and began to wear down the front running *Pinchme*. But the six horse held on to win by a nose and I gave a triumphant yell. Old Albert had won his second Exacta.

Glancing at the tote-board I saw that *Pinchme* had gone off at forty to one. *Barbeebabee* had been only a little less of a long shot at thirty to one. I broke into a sweat. At those prices the Exacta would pay a small fortune.

Then the *Inquiry* light began to flash on the tote-board. I groaned. A foul had been claimed against the second horse, *Barbeebabee*. If it was upheld, the horse would be removed from second place to third — or even to last, depending on the seriousness of the foul. In either case it would be goodbye to Albert's big winning Exacta.

I placed up and down in front of the stands, sweating it out for the poor guy, for the ten minutes it took for the judges to question the riders and study the running of the race on film.

Finally, an excited roar went up from the crowd. The objection had not held up and the result was official in its original order. *Pinchme* paid \$86.00 and some change to win. *Barbeebabee* paid \$32.00 for second place.

The Exacta paid \$6,478.60.

Albert's two tickets were worth nearly thirteen thousand dollars. I didn't cash the tickets. Any race track winning ticket with a

value over \$600.00 and you have to identify yourself, give your name and address, for the IRS people. I didn't want to be stuck with the tax on that kind of money. How Albert would collect, I wasn't sure, but we'd work it out some way. He probably could send the tickets to the track by certified mail and they would then mail him a check. Later the IRS people would visit him to collect their share.

Back home, I pulled into the carport, climbed the stairs to the patio area. I didn't go right to Albert's apartment. I figured that if Gertie had already gone to the supermarket Albert would have the door opened, waiting for me. I could imagine how he was going to look.

I went to my own flat and watched out the window for Gertie to leave. A half-hour went by and she still didn't come out. I began to worry. I went over and knocked on their door.

Gertie opened it. "Yes?" she said.

"I'd like to talk to Albert for a moment."

She shook her head. "Uh-uh. You can't." There was a look on her face I didn't like at all. She was trying to look shocked or sad or something, but it didn't come off. Not with that triumphant gleam in her eyes that she couldn't quite hide.

"You won't ever be able to talk to Albert again," she said.

"What do you mean?" I knew, of course, but I couldn't quite accept it that suddenly.

"Poor Albert's gone. He's dead."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes. While he was listening to the race results, I guess, he had a violent seizure. When I came home he was sprawled on the floor in front of his wheelchair, dead. The radio was still blaring."

"When you came home? What time was that?"

She rolled her eyes upward. "Oh, let me see. Not long. Maybe an hour ago. I guess it happened while he was listening to the results of the last race."

I didn't know what to say. Maybe there was nothing to say. It figured. The tremendous excitement he went through listening to the close finish of that race, knowing that he'd finally hit a big one, plus the terrible strain of sweating out the Inquiry.

Then I remembered something. Albert kept medication on hand to help him survive an attack if administered promptly.

I said: "Where were you, Gertie, when it happened?"

"At the market, shopping." Her glance flicked away from mine for an instant.

"You never go to the market that early," I said sharply. "Usually not until after I get home from the track. Isn't it a little strange that—"

She interrupted me, tilting her double chins defiantly: "So I went a little early today. Is there a law against it? What's it to you?"

"Nothing." I now knew what had happened, but I couldn't prove it so there was no point in throwing it at her.

She was lying. She was there when Albert keeled over out of his wheelchair. She saw what happened and instead of going after his medication — maybe she could have saved him, maybe not, but she could've tried — she left the apartment and went to the market so that she could say she was out of the flat when it happened. She deliberately let Albert die.

If it *hadn't* happened that way, how did she know he had the attack while he was listening to the results of the ninth race?

"I'm sorry," I said. "Will you let me know when the services will be held? I'd like to pay my respects. He was my friend."

She nodded and slammed the door in my face. She probably wanted to be alone to plan how she would spend Albert's ten thousand insurance money that she didn't know she would never see.

I went back to my own place. That night I got roaring drunk and didn't go to work. I sat with the bottle and a glass and those two race track pasteboards worth nearly \$13,000.00 in front of me and did a little wrestling with my

conscience. But not much.

Albert once told me he had no living relatives. At the same time he told me that if anything should happen to him before his racing bankroll was used up, I wasn't to give any balance to Gertie. He didn't want her to have a penny of his money. He wanted me to keep it.

Still, legally, the thirteen was hers. All right, so I was going to do something illegal. But I figured it was *morally* right.

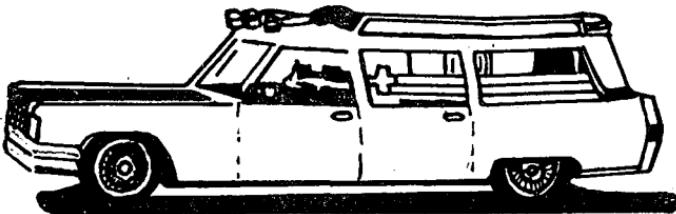
Gertie never told me about the funeral so I missed it. One of the neighbors said it was miserable, paid for by Social Security money. Gertie never shed a tear, just stood there with a hateful look on her face, probably wondering what the hell happened to all that insurance money, knowing that somehow Albert got in the last lick against her.

What did I do with the money? I thought a lot about Albert's dream, taking a cruise around the world on a luxury liner. It was no longer possible for him, but why couldn't I do it for him?

I'm not a religious man and don't believe much in the supernatural, but I'll be damned if some times when I was most enjoying the cruise, I'd have this weird feeling that old Albert was right there, getting his kicks, too.

Not in person, of course, but like, maybe in spirit. Or something.

# Ambulance Report



by MORGAN POWELL

Terse, Terrifying, to the Point!

DAILY LOG, Metropolitan Emergency Vehicle Service

Date: June 21-22

Vehicle Number : 3

Crew: Medical Technicians Adam Kirby and Virginia Hayes

Logged In: 9:55 p.m., June 21

Logged Out: 6:02 a.m., June 22

\* \* \*

## REPORT:

10:15 p.m., Hayes driving, Kirby attending, responded to a 10-43 at 114 Old Mill street. Proceeded to curbside with difficulty, scene being one of inner-city confusion and excitement, a noisy crowd milling in street. Present were three police cars, six officers.

Situation: Body of girl, 12 years of age, lay on sidewalk. Identified as Penelope "Penny" Brown, resident of tenement in adjacent block. Missing from her home 3

hours. Apparently lured into apartment of Lloyd Stryker, age 28, known deviate. Medical examiner was present, reporting that child had been assaulted and thrown from fourth floor window. Elderly woman across street was sitting at her open window to catch a breeze in the current heat wave and said that she saw Stryker come to his window, Penny Brown in his arms, and throw the child out. Eyewitness immediately phoned for police and ambulance.

M.E. pronounced Penelope Brown dead. Sedated the child's hysterical mother. Backup vehicle arrived and received body of child. We in vehicle #3 transported Mrs. Brown to Emergency One, Central City Hospital.

\* \* \* \* \*

11:55 p.m., Kirby driving, Hayes attending, responded to a 10-45 at 237 Old Mill Street. Present were two police cars, four officers. Gunshot victim, elderly man identified as Walter Joyner, age 67, resident same address. Subject was lying on floor in cramped kitchen of his apartment, suffering bullet penetration left clavicle. Pupil dilation, clamminess, but conscious and coherent. Had told officers that Lloyd Stryker, attempting to effect flight from Old Mill Street vicinity, had forced entry, demanding car keys and subject's compliance as hostage. When subject resisted, Stryker shot him and fled.

Removed Walter Joyner to Central City Hospital. Subject suffered cardiac arreton en route. DOA.

\* \* \* \* \*

1:15 a.m., Hayes driving, Kirby attending, responded to a 10-45 at 1368 Old Mill Street. Area heavily cordoned to prevent Lloyd Stryker's flight from vicinity. Special Forces teams engaged in house-to-house search. Officer Quin Mathews slumped in dimly lighted vestibule. Suffering medium-caliber bullet penetration right temple. Entry point only, no

egress. Lloyd Stryker fired as Mathews and one other officer were starting search of building. Stryker fled through a service door, was not apprehended.

Transported Officer Mathews to Central City Hospital where emergency team was standing by. Early prognosis: total paralysis right side if Officer Mathews survives.

\* \* \* \* \*

1:40 a.m., Kirby driving, Hayes attending, responded to a 10-80 at 114 Old Mill Street. Once more at Lloyd Stryker's address. Subject was Stryker's mother, Mrs. Eileen Stryker, age 50. Neighbor said that Mrs. Stryker had returned from waitress job in trucker's stop at 12:30 a.m. and learned news about her son. At 1:35 a.m. a police officer, member search teams, conducted a recheck of apartment. Found Mrs. Stryker in comatose state, heavily drugged on sleeping pills which she had apparently administered to herself. Removed subject at once and employed all resuscitating equipment in vehicle #3 while en route to hospital. Measures failed. DOA.

\* \* \* \* \*

2:35 a.m., Hayes driving, Kirby attending, responded to a 10-45 at 497 Old Mill Street. Cordon had closed on Lloyd Stryker. Subject was lying in filthy upper hallway, bleeding profusely from severed carotid artery after shootout with police.

En route to Emergency One,

engine of vehicle #3 began to misfire. Engine stalled. Efforts to restart engine were unsuccessful.

Due to delay, Stryker bled to death. DOA, when backup vehicle was finally located, dispatched, and delivered subject to Emergency One.

\* \* \*

5 a.m. Investigation begun to determine reason for vehicle #3's engine difficulties. Cap missing from gas tank. Bits of foreign matter impacted in gasoline filter and needle valves, cutting off flow of fuel. First analysis by technicians identifies foreign matter as bits of tobacco. Obviously, someone fed a freshly opened package of cigarettes into the gas tank

while attention was focussed on the building at 497 Old Mill Street, results being fairly predictable.

\* \* \*

WHO WENT smokeless after Stryker's night-long Old Mill Street rampage? A slum-neighborhood prankster . . . a son with a loved one included among Stryker's victims . . . a compatriot of Officer Mathews who had the notion the courts would deal too leniently with Stryker?

The questions may never be officially answered. Cigarettes are such common little booby traps. But as the Surgeon General has mentioned, they can be dangerous to your health.

---

## COMING NEXT MONTH:

**NO DAY FOR MURDER** by BRETT HALLIDAY  
Short Novel of Mike Shayne in Deadly Danger

**THE TATTERED CORPSE** by W.L. FIELDHOUSE  
A Superb New Major Lansing Novelette

Plus Exciting Short Stories

---

# Stiff Competition

by JOHN BALL

*“... the mystery story has more than come of age, and the public has so willed it by providing millions of readers... to be instructed, baffled, and entertained. The standards have steadily risen...”*

John Ball,

*The Mystery Story*

MYSTERY BUFFS, ourselves included, can give thanks to Dover Press for a fine and growing series of quality paperback reprints of great mystery classics. Now available are Sax Rohmer's *The Dream Detective*, Robert Van Gulik's *The Hunted Monastery* and *The Chinese Maze Murders*, Maurice LeBlanc's *Extraordinary Adventures of Arsene Lupin*, C. Daly King's *The Curious Mr.*

*Tarrant*, and T.S. Stribling's *Clues of the Caribbean*. This last contains the justly famous “A Passage to Benares,” a short story with one of the most explosive unexpected endings in the entire literature. If you haven't read it, don't miss it. A suggestion to Dover: how about giving us the almost unobtainable work by Canon Victor Whitechurch, *Thrilling Tales of the Railway*.

Dover's fine program and The Mystery Library of the University of California, San Diego Extension make it possible to read, enjoy, and own the real monuments in the enormously fascinating field of crime and suspense literature.



Agatha Christie fans will be very glad to know that a fine collection of her plays has been made available by Dodd Mead. Together with an introduction by Ira Levin there are eight of Dame Agatha's most famous works for the theater including (what else!) *The Mousetrap*. There is also *Witness for the Prosecution*, *Ten Little Indians* and several other titles almost as well known. It isn't easy to see all of these works on the stage or screen, but here they are to be enjoyed: a fitting tribute to the late great lady whose name in literary history is secure. Dodd Mead \$12.95.



Rabbi Davis Small completes his memorable week with *Thursday the Rabbi Walked Out*. Once again the rabbi's devoted followers in his congregation are trying to get him out and once again he saves his job without trying by a minute margin. While the infighting is going on at the temple, the rabbi has another murder to solve.

We confess to preferring "Tuesday" as the rabbi's best day, but all seven of his appearances have been delightful and this one follows the pattern. I wonder what the rabbi will be doing in January, since the days of the week are all used up. Harry Kemelman wrote it, of course. Morrow \$8.95.



It is sad to report that *No Sign of Life* is probably Michael Delving's last book. Antique dealer Dave Cannon encounters a supremely bitchy female executive on his way to solving a murder among a group of American tourists caught in rural England. A good performance, although without the bite of the antique trade found in *The Judas Pair* by Jonathan Cash. Delving entertains as always and the country background comes through in fine style. Doubleday Crime Club \$7.95



A very interesting new entry is *The Pro-Am Murders* by Patrick Cade, the pseudonym of a widely known mystery literature personality on the West Coast. What makes this book unusual is the abundant supply of photo illustrations which make the setting, the Bing Crosby Tournament, come alive. The pictures are not there for clues, but to bring home to the reader the rich atmosphere

in which the story takes place. The last illustrated mysteries we can recall offhand are those by Willetta Ann Barber with drawings by the late R.F. Schabelitz which appeared during the forties. *The Pro-Am Murders* is a good story made better by the shots of the actual scene, the golf tournament, and some of the celebrities who participate. Highly recommended as a unique item. Proteus Press \$8.95



*False Flags* by Noel Hynd is an espionage novel that probably holds the record for the number of switches that are incorporated in the plot. Again the CIA appears as the whipping boy, but not in the manner of some authors who allow their personal feelings to cloud their literary judgment. This is a very complicated adventure, but it reads swiftly and well despite a couple of loose ends at the finish. If the underworld of international intrigue is your dish, then here is an impressive new entry. The Dial Press \$8.95



John Masters, who has written so splendidly about India in the past, is back with a fine new novel with a contemporary setting. He brings a strong and compelling evocation of Kashmir and the whole Himalayan region. The plot

concerns a musician *cum* intelligence agent who is trying to compose a Himalayan Concerto based on the fascinating music of that part of the world. The story is a good and engaging one, but the background against which it is played is very nearly as magnificent as the unparalleled mountains that fill the pages of this book. Having traveled extensively through this region I found Mr. Masters' new work to be "right on" in every respect. If this exotic part of the world interests you, or even if it doesn't, this is a fine book not to be missed. Doubleday \$8.95



Two first novels recently out are definitely worth notice. *Singled Out* by Steven Whitney reveals a fresh talent, and one that may develop into a major crime writer. The mad killer theme is used once again; this time single girls are being attacked by means of an icepick. Unfortunately toward the end Mr. Whitney makes some basic errors in police procedures. Cops do not respond code three with lights and siren to the scene of a stake-out, but apart from such lapses he tells a very good story. Morrow \$8.95



Anne V. Badgley makes her bow in *The Rembrandt Decisions*, a Gothic that should win her some

well-pleased fans due to her original idea. A qualified female expert on drawings is hired to catalog the vast collection of an eccentric and very elderly collector who, of course, lives in an isolated mansion with his precious possessions. Miss Badgley commits the error of having most of her climactic action happen off-stage; we only hear about it, and some questions are left unanswered. If you want your violence at a distance, this is the very thing. Dodd Mead \$8.95

Club \$7.95

★ ★ ★

*Code Z* by Joel Swerdlow is a new thriller which offers the proposition that in a genuine emergency, the President of the United States would step aside to allow a specially trained crisis manager to take over. Also the manager in this case is in his early thirties. This is a bit hard to swallow, but if digested, what follows is a remarkably readable book in which the Washington scene is depicted with penetrating insight. The author writes for the *Washington Post*. He has a solid grasp of the unrelenting political infighting and the constant battles to gain or retain power. When a reviewer buys a book to read as I did this one that is news, I'm looking forward very much to his next. Putnam \$9.95

★ ★ ★

Those of us who mourn John Creasy know that that fine friend can never be replaced. He was a unique person, who would be made happy to know that his literary successor appears to be coming on the scene. He is a young Scot named Bill Knox who writes prolifically and well. His latest is *Salvage Job* as by Michael Kirk. While this not a new monument in the literature, and isn't intended to be, it is a very good evening's read. All about a tanker that runs aground off Portugal and partially blocks a small harbor. Obviously there are complications which are well worked out and which fit together very neatly. Most definitely we will be hearing from Mr. Knox again, and undoubtedly frequently, which is all to the good. Doubleday Crime

*Watch Out Behind You* department. If you missed it, go back and get hold of a copy of *True Confessions* by John Gregory Dunne. (Dutton 1977 \$9.95) A splendidly realistic recreation of the famous Black Dahlia unsolved murder, this concerns two brothers: one a priest, the other a cop. The language is totally vivid, but that's how it was at that time. People talk incessantly about Hammett and Chandler; it's about time they started talking about Dunne.

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# The House In Downey



by JERRY JACOBSON

Forrester Was a Hasbeen Who Had No Business Investigating a Double Murder. His Answer Was to Set Up a Third Victim: Himself.

SAMUEL Forrester, knowing the predictable formula ending to *Whatever Shall We Do With Wesley?* long before he'd reached

its final chapter, nonetheless gave duty its due and plunged into it as though it were one of his own abscessed molars whose knifing

pain of extraction he would have to endure. This was an utterly ridiculous mystery novel by a currently popular novelist named Graham John. He was fashionable in California just now because his characters and settings were Southern Californian and his dead bodies kept turning up in hot tubs, on the beaches of Big Sur, in the trunks of zippy sports cars and amid the dregs of outdoor rock concerts and disco palace parking lots.

Forrester finished it and began feeling signals telling him to hustle to the bathroom and throw up. The feeling showed strength but failed to crest. When it subsided, he rose with the book and walked from his second-floor bungalow apartment at the Sea-Palms Motor Court and downstairs to the green mini-dumpster next to the ice-making machine and Mrs. McGillity's office. He lifted the dumpster's lid and with two long fingers laid Graham John's newest novel to rest in the only place it properly belonged, saying no eulogy and giving it not a second glance.

It was a fine Santa Barbara morning, one not to be despoiled by fictive garbage. The fishing fleet had caught an early tide and the basin stood quiet and desolate. The children of out-of-state tourists fished the docks, and the strollers and bicyclers moved up and down the boulevard in a solid stream.

Mrs. McGillity, perhaps because the dumpster's lid had caused such a racket, came out of her unit. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Forrester." Her stern eyes relaxed. "I thought you were someone stealing ice again."

Tourists who stayed at the Sea Palms filled ice chests and bathtubs from the ancient ice machine even though a sign on it indicated the ice was to be used for cooling drinks only. Forrester couldn't recall the last time the machine had more than a handful of ice in it.

"It is stealing, you know."  
"Yes, Mrs. McGillity."

"They take everything. Soap, towels, my plastic ice buckets, lamps. If it isn't nailed down, it walks off. Someone took a star out of the sidewalk last week. You know, where they have the Walk of the Stars. Just took a pick-axe to the pavement and carted it off. George Arliss it was."

"Always liked George Arliss," said Forrester. "Maybe if they nailed them down."

"Wouldn't do any good. They'd come across country with claw hammers. You just throw out your garbage?"

"In a manner of speaking," he told the woman.

"Oh. Another mystery novel that doesn't make it."

"*Whatever Shall We Do About Wesley?*" Forrester warned. "Run from it as you would run from a cloud of approaching

locusts or nuclear fallout."

Forrester was in the habit of distributing the passably good ones to Mrs. McGillity to read and then shoot along to the three or four elderly females who also rented monthly at the Sea-Palms. But not his.

"You reviewing this one or just endorsing?" The "just endorsing" was not meant to come out as a slur against his latest profession, but that didn't save Forrester from feeling the sharp heat of shame pass through his body and his damaged soul. "Endorsing," he told her quietly, then turned and went back to his room.

These lean and fallen days, he made what qualified as a living writing book reviews for two Los Angeles newspapers and from lending his name and his literary accolades to book jackets for several New York publishers. The former was outright honorable work. He was paid by the newspapers whether he heaped praise or dispensed damnation. But the latter, he was sorry to admit to himself, was awfully close to being a criminal activity. He was paid \$1,500 each time he let fall onto paper another whitish lie in defense of a mediocre mystery author and his less than satisfying tale. He gained some salvation and sanity by thinking he was passing judgment on an initial effort whose fledgling author would improve, or was giving credit to a fluke by an established

writer whose next book would more than make up for Forrester's own fiction.

He got some coffee and seated himself before his ancient Adler in the breakfast nook. His searched his mind to find some minuscule bit of truth in the lie he was about to utter from his fingertips. He saw the ghost of his conscience leering at him from its perch atop a stainless steel napkin dispenser. He shut his eyes a moment but when he opened them again, it was still there, left leg crossed over its right, its featureless face staring him down.

The ghost wasn't going to leave, but Forrester could create in the presence of his company. He typed:

"This, Graham John's first novel, gives every indication there will be more of the same. He could very well become one of our finest writers in the genre."

Forrester prayed there would be no more to come, while he tried to calculate the odds against Graham John becoming anything more than mildly disappointing. Quickly, before a wave of nausea and disgust overcame him, he typed two additional sentences similarly riddled with half-truths and double entendre, ripped the sheet from the Adler, signed his name to it and jammed it into an envelope addressed to Gaylon Evans, Endorsements Editor, Mystery Press Ltd., New York, New York.

The nearest mailbox was three blocks south of the Sea-Palms. He more marched than walked down to it, carefully avoiding eye contact with passersby. He felt like a secret revolutionary mailing off a letter bomb to Sacramento, like a man about to set into motion the machinery of ransom so that the nephew of a Lockheed board chairman could be released, like a scoundrel about to trigger commerce through a chain letter whose topmost names were his own and two aliases with post office boxes. He slipped the letter into the mouth of the box, tried to feel fifteen hundred dollars richer but couldn't, and turned it a cold shoulder as though it were an accomplice thief whose existence caused him unqualified revulsion, but without whose assistance he could not long survive. That he had to engage in this sort of thievery only once each month was scant relief. He quietly made a pact with his conscience that when he was through with this sort of trickery, when he quit it cold, he would voluntarily check into some county jail or other for ninety days of atonement.

It was too early for lunch and a bit late for breakfast. He walked two blocks farther down the boulevard and turned into Manzanelli's Lobster House, through a silent and empty restaurant (it opened at two p.m. in deference to the midday popularity of a glut of fast food hamburger restaurants

which hemmed it in on both sides and across the street), and into the bar. Fat Paul acknowledged his appearance with a nod and set to making up Forrester's habitual pina colada, cut back just slightly on the rum.

Forrester's system could not tolerate hard liquor beyond child's portions. His own father, a courageous but quiet longshoreman in San Pedro, had died from its abuses before this time. Forrester had been twelve years old. Burned still in his mind was the letter written to him in a burst of death-bed advice, composed only ten hours before the elder Forrester died.

"Son," his father had warned, "it appears the Forresters are fated to be housed in bodies whose chemical tolerance for booze is lower than a rat's belly in the hold of a freighter resting on the bottom of San Pedro Harbor. Steer clear of it or it will find you an early grave. In the beginning I drank it because it was an enemy I did not recognize. Now, at the end, I drink it because it has become a friend who deals me the self-administered anesthetic. I need to dispel my fear of death. Get an education. Be just the slightest bit wary of those who would call themselves your friends and your enemies. The former can be expected to turn on you quicker than a game of poker where the protection of their own interests is concerned. And the latter can sometimes become the only true

friends you will ever have if you can turn their feelings toward you, because they will always tell you the truth."

For such a massive, silent, brooding man, the letter represented the outpouring of his very soul. The father had solved for the son a part of the mystery of why he drank, and he had turned some useful fatherly advice in the bargain. Forrester had felt twice blessed.

"Pina colada, Mr. Forrester," said Fat Paul, "soft on the Cruzan. How's the screen treatment coming along?"

Forrester lifted a hand in the air and fluttered it like a ship being tossed in a moderate sea. The screen treatment was pure concoction, of course, though Fat Paul continued to believe Forrester was still tethered to the Hollywood people down the coast. In point of fact, that tether had broken and set Forrester free eight years before after two of his earlier novels had seen adaptation. After the success enjoyed at the Box office by *The Bloodstone Conspiracy* and *Identity Crisis*, a thick knot of moguls convinced him his future and his strength lay in treatments and screenplays. There followed a petty string of spoofs which, perhaps out of respect for those who had gone before, remained shelved or unshot — *The Big Nap*, *The Man Who Knew But Did not Know What*, *North By Southwest By*

*Northeast By South*. Mel Brookes, then a swaddled infant just learning the horrible knack of spitting his food for effect, could have learned something about the atrocious pun, the outlandish send-up, the lampooning mania set loose to roam the screen like tigers turned out on Sunset Boulevard. But the films were sent off to scrap.

It was then, Forrester had now come to acknowledge, that the dust and dismissal of his life truly began. Stalwarts he had grown up admiring — Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, George Harmon Coxe, the full lot of them — pulled up stakes in Beverly Hills and South Pasadena before they suffered the indignity of being sent packing. The gloriously cynical era of the hard-boiled private eye on celluloid was over almost before it had begun, leaving the punk-kid survivors like Forrester standing in the horrible void, grateful for studio assignments and meager contracts to crank out everything from High Adventure to pitifully Low Drama and a nauseating spate of Deanna Durbin movies. The war verging, there wasn't all that much honest work up for grabbing, so Forrester opted for the line of least resistance and highest pay.

He pretended to be brilliant, but it came in only brief displays of light. Why did these people always have to *dance* and *sing* in place of the spoken word?

Why must there habitually be thirty-two bars of song, incorporating six minutes of snappy choreography, to indicate a principal was shooting off for the john? Reading a love-letter from that boy in the service flung ever so far from home? Making marvel of a fresh, new day? Forrester waited impatiently for the private eye cycle to come its comet way around again. But, alas, it had jumped its orbit, gone off into space, never to be seen properly and fully again.

And if the mountain of circumstance and lost opportunities were not already heaped high enough upon his finicky, fifty-six-year-old back, Forrester came upon the terrifying discovery that his mind had suddenly lost its fine and certain edge. The suspense thrillers he formerly turned out with rapidity and ease could not be brought up by simple bidding. A curious malfunction rose in him, and it was one he could neither understand, nor, worse, correct. He had lost his delicate touch with trends, he was simply tired and growing old and soon to die and be put to earth in the way of all men. Anything was possible and nothing was clear. Phrasing was a thing with which he fought; metaphors were angry warriors who stood distant from him; plots were thick, unmanageable tangles, like plates of spaghetti dumped into his lap.

"A second pina colada for you,

Mr. Forrester?"

"No, Paul, thanks."

"More is the pity," Fat Paul said, in his lame way of indicating he fought the classics and though he had lost, could at least quote to prove he had been in the battle. "Like to keep my more illustrious customers around a little longer."

The same could be said for Forrester's fading professional acumen, its own luster now dimmer than pumice, but he swallowed any mention of it. Eulogies were perfectly correct at the site of the grave and for the period for grieving which followed. But not eight years after the fact. Each event had its own time and place, after all, reserved for its special moment. All the rest was maudlin and foolishly melodramatic and, additionally, poor sportsmanship.

The California sun outside Manzanelli's was severe, especially when it struck the exposed flesh of older men. Forrester's eyes recoiled at its glare, like a kid coming out from a Saturday matinee. He walked another half-block south to the glut of vending boxes ranked at the curb outside the Deluxe Coin-Op Laundramat, pulled out a fistful of small change and began moving down the row, feeding coins and extracting papers like a glutton who could not resist the delicacies beckoning from behind tiny windows in an automat. The *L.A. Times*, and *Herald-Examiner*; two tabloids

for amusement and titillation; a couple of cult journals chronicling the outre activities of sects of California hedonists, satanists, flat-earthers, and plant worshippers. And, for balance, a copy of the Santa Barbara daily.

Grist for his mill in former years, Forrester now consumed facts and events merely out of habit and an old and deeply ingrained curiosity that would not die. And for one other reason. At odd times, when he sought a view of his future in his mind's eye, glanced down the funnel of his remaining years, he caught a glimpse of one last, grand novel that once and for all time would clear the storehouse of his brain, allowing him to approach his death emptied of data, the nooks and crannies of his mind swept clean, the inventory reduced to nil as he stood proudly before his God as a soul divested and ordered awaiting his new destination and its tasks.

Usually, he simply tucked the papers beneath an arm to be methodically examined back at Sea-Palms. Except that a large line of type set at the lower right-hand corner of the Santa Barbara paper hooked his attention. *Local Insurance Man Found Dead.*

The article spread beneath it was no longer than the width of three fingers. It related that John Graffmeyer, a local independent insurance agent who lived at 1213 Escallonia Court, had been found

dead by a police patrol unit at three a.m. that morning. The officer had gone down to the beach to inspect a bonfire left burning and unattended. Returning from the spot, the patrol officer sighted Graffmeyer's body lying at the foot of the sandy embankment which ran the full length of the beach, twenty feet or so below Camarillo Boulevard where it intersected with Shute Street.

The officer who discovered Graffmeyer's body was not mentioned in the article by name and there was no accompanying photograph of Graffmeyer. But Forrester knew him. Twelve years earlier, Graffmeyer had secured Forrester's decreasing term life insurance policy with a Los Angeles-based life and casualty firm. When Forrester and his wife separated, Forrester spent months searching his mind for a way to compensate Joanna for the years of neglect. The house in Altadena and the nine-year-old Alfa Romeo, rusting and aging from unrealized dreams, accrued to her out of natural good sportsmanship; but Forrester was gnawed by the thought that these possessions were paltry by California mutual-property standards.

Making her the beneficiary of his death seemed the most chivalrous act he could effect, so he called Graffmeyer, who came by Forrester's room at the Sea-Palms that same evening. He was a slight, bespectacled man, un-

commonly ordinary and polite in the extreme, an insurance agent who declined coffee and a cigarette from Forrester and said he did not drink alcohol either. Perched on the edge of a couch, his tiny fingers flew to taking notes like slender, white birds set free. He spent five minutes at it, no more, then assured Forrester he would obtain for him the best decreasing term coverage that could be bought. Forrester read his tone as unboastful, forthright, sincere.

At the door they shook hands. Graffmeyer's grip was neither warm, nor cold, neither forceful nor fishy. How had Forrester read it, then? Yes. It was the handshake of a man who wanted to move on to his work, who wanted to be neither an obstacle nor a contender, but merely the anonymous conduit through which passed the needs of others to be insured against misfortune, illness, calamity, death. He cared only to vanish back into thin air to do his business, a virtuoso who would come into no unusual acclaim save the acknowledgment that he was dependable, sincere and good at his work.

They never spoke in person again. One week later, Forrester received his policy in the mail from Graffmeyer, with a letter thanking Forrester for allowing him to act as his agent, almost apologetically stating his commission in a small, unassuming little

bill no larger than an index card. Forrester's premium payment booklet would reach him from his insurer within ten days, as indeed it did. Once or twice, Forrester thought he glimpsed Graffmeyer in the downtown district of Santa Barbara, moving on errands or business, transporting packages or mailing letters or negotiating his automobile from a parking lot or a metered space on the street. Forrester even recalled waving to him, but his wave was never returned or, more likely, never seen. A man who did not wish to intrude, distract or alienate.

Now, his sincerest intentions had run afoul, had brought him an enemy who had caused his violent death.

SHUTE STREET was only five blocks farther down Camarillo Boulevard, and Forrester couldn't resist trekking up there for a peek at the scene of the crime. Old instincts and sensations began once more to stir in him, the sleeping beast of his profession too long at its slumbers. He came to Shute Street and crossed Camarillo, stunting to stay out of the paths of bicyclers and tourists in their cars.

The pipe railing along the concrete bulkhead was chest-high for an adult, with two intermediate three-inch bars that were knee-high and waist-high. The sidewalk served as the top of the bulkhead

which, in harsh winter weather, caught the full fury of Pacific waves which in times of storms could mount to heights of eight feet and more. Forrester leaned his chest against the topmost span of pipe and looked down the side of the bulkhead. The drop to the sloping sandhill near its base was roughly ten feet, and it was immediately evident to Forrester that whoever had investigated the scene hadn't smoothed the sand where John Graffmeyer's body had impacted it and then rolled and toppled down to level ground. A perfect trench could be seen, a bit wider than the width of a body, where Graffmeyer had slid, unconscious and likely dead even as his body had been pitched over the railing.

Had he been killed there on Camarillo Boulevard? For evidence of that fact, Forrester searched the pavement in the vicinity of where he now stood, but found nothing to resemble stains of blood. So whoever had murdered Graffmeyer had killed him elsewhere and then transported his victim to this spot, where Shute Street ended, one of the few intersections that could qualify as desolate. A service station on one corner, a seafood packing plant on the other, both of which had likely been closed at the time of the killing. Yes, Forrester now stood a good six blocks from what could be called Tourist Row with its clutter of beachfront

motels and bars and restaurants. Graffmeyer's killer had simply driven up to the spot, waited until the highway and sidewalks were barren of cars and pedestrians and had then dumped Graffmeyer over the railing. A matter of a minute or so, perhaps not even that. Get out, get out the body, dump it, get back in and get away. Bam, zip, bang. No witnesses, no mess, no distress.

Forrester, of course, was stealing no marches on anyone with what he had already surmised. The Santa Barbara Homicide detectives (there were only two of them) had likely reached these conclusions and perhaps a few more as well. The salient point was, was this the spot at which Forrester ceased and desisted in the matter of the violent demise of John Graffmeyer? No, he owed this quiet, polite insurance agent a far sight more than morbid curiosity.

Escallonia Court turned out to be a narrow, three-block lane east of the Sea-Palms by a quarter mile and north of Santa Barbara's business district. Nearly all of the cramped little houses were of Spanish white stucco and jammed shoulder-to-shoulder San Francisco style. In front of 1213 stood a Santa Barbara police patrol car and an unmarked with city plates. Forrester parked behind these and climbed the steep set of stone stairs.

The house's front door was

open. A uniformed cop stood guard at the end of the short entry hall, and beyond his bulky form Forrester could pick out one-half of Santa Barbara's Homicide Division, Lieutenant Harlan Bergy, randomly extracting papers and file folders from a gray, four-drawer metal file cabinet that was set against a far wall of Graffmeyer's cramped living room. Next to it was a serving window which gave a glimpse of the kitchen. Bergy had a cup of coffee set atop it and a slab of chocolate cake a man smaller than Bergy might have balked at cutting off for himself. But Bergy had never been the type of turn his back on foodstuffs that would only run to spoilage in a dead person's house.

The patrolman lifted an arm to block Forrester's entry. "Sorry, sir. Criminal investigation in progress."

"Hey, Bergy? Can I pop in for a look-see?" Forrester said in a raised voice.

They knew each other from the old days when Bergy had been a third-grade in the Hollenbeck Division and Forrester had done a brief stint as the police beat reporter for the *Herald Examiner*. Bergy shunned him now because he thought that he'd gone Hollywood. That Forrester now was a dried-out version of a producing writer hadn't softened Bergy's low opinion of him.

"Well, well. Forrester. I hadn't

realized an official meddler had been assigned to this case. Let him in, Gossett, he's entirely harmless."

"Cophouse journalists never die, Bergy," Forrester told him, "we just lose our press cards."

"This just informal meddling, Forrester, or did you know the deceased?"

"Graffmeyer? Yes, I knew him. He sold me a life insurance policy a few years back."

"You and about a thousand other people," said Bergy, indicating the file cabinet whose drawers were stuffed with folders.

"Graffmeyer's keys turned up missing, so we're figuring his killer came back here afterwards to rifle his files for anything that might incriminate him. Been looking for an index card crossfile or somesuch, but Graffmeyer didn't keep one. No way to tell what's missing and what isn't."

Bergy paused in his chaotic search for a bite of cake and a gulp of coffee. "If you're nosing around for a screen treatment here, Forrester, you won't find enough for a one-reeler."

"A man supposedly without an enemy in the world?" Forrester said. "Strikes me as being about as tenuous a grip on the cliff's edge as you could want."

"It'll probably turn out to be some guy who couldn't get up his premium," said Lieutenant Bergy. "Or some transient punk just passing through the valley."

Forrester saw no earthly reason to tarry here. Bergy was up to his eyeballs in manila folders and confusion, and being a part of that was a bit like wanting to throw oneself into the middle of a train wreck.

"Can I have your okay to stop back later if my mind should be struck with a notion?"

"Sorry, Forrester," said Bergy. "When I wrap it up here, a seal goes onto the door and the next guy to break it will either the state's prosecutor, the next of kin or the executor of Graffmeyer's will."

"Know who the executor is?" Forrester asked.

"Not yet. Don't even know yet if he made out a will. But all that will fall into place as we go along. Wills, safe deposit boxes, suspects. Anything else you want to pry about, Forrester?"

"Not a thing. I'll let myself out, don't bother."

"Forrester, at my age and in this heat, I never bother."

Forrester glanced around for innocent bystanders and one in particular who was the guilty party, but there was no one. He wondered just when and under what circumstances John Graffmeyer's killer would return to the scene of the crime? They always did. Hell, it was straight out of the *Screenplay Writer's Handbook*.

The next few days, Forrester kept a close eye on the local paper,

expecting the break in the case that didn't come. It could be that Bergy was juggling cases, or working two or three different departments. Or it could more likely be that he had no substantial leads on which he could move.

Then, on a Thursday, a second violent death took place. A Santa Barbara physician, Dr. Warren Strathmore, had been found shot to death at his hillside residence sometime during the hours before dawn. The general practitioner physician, whose home doubled as his medical offices, was found by a house keeper who had routinely come to the house for her once-weekly cleaning. She discovered Strathmore's body still propped up in bed, two bullet-holes in his light green pajama top, behind which lay his heart.

The room had been ransacked, as if to indicate Strathmore had been killed by a burglar, or by someone who had made a frantic search for something specific. In a den, two drawers of a file cabinet were found flung open, but a "police spokesperson" indicated there was no way to tell this early whether anything had been taken from it. Forrester wondered if the spokesperson was Lieutenant Bergy. If it was, then Forrester didn't much envy him. Two nasty little murders in less than two weeks, quite enough to try the patience and sanity of even the most philosophical homicide detective.

An insurance agent and now a physician. It was no tremendous leap to the conclusion that they could be related professionally. Insurance agents often sent prospective insurees to physicians for medical examinations where health and life insurance were concerned. But Forrester began to feel his imagination strain as he tried to convince himself a person might kill over the denial or cancellation of an insurance policy. A saner course of action would be simply to thumb your nose at your agent and go off in search of a new one who placed a little less importance on the state of the insuree's health. Yet the two killings did stand a slim chance of being related.

Warren Strathmore lived on Arroyo Seco Drive, a lane of expensive homes in the Mission Canyon area. That afternoon, Forrester, unable to beat back his building curiosity, drove up there to find Bergy already on the job. Forrester passed the dour-faced deputy coroner on his way down the front walk. "Cadging off the city's business to write the great Santa Barbara mystery, Forrester?"

"Your mother suck on lemons during childbirth, Quinn?" Forrester shot back and let it go that he could still turn a biting rejoinder off the top of his head even at this late date in his life.

Forrester found Bergy in the Strathmore den, once more in a

brief span of days trying to make heads and tails of a man's files.

"No guard on the door, Bergy? And Quinn actually moving his butt out of the City Hall basement for a change? Tch, tch. One might believe there was a rash of killings all of a sudden."

Bergy glanced up only long enough to throw Forrester a withering look and then plunged back into Strathmore's files. "You missed the body by a few hours," he said without glancing up again. "They say the timing starts to go with old age."

"If you've seen one," Forrester said, "you've pretty much seen them all. You think this one's connected with Graffmeyer's?"

"An insurance agent and a physician, you mean? Yes, the possibility caught my attention."

"And he wanted to relieve Strathmore of some files and make it appear a burglary-murder, just as with Graffmeyer, and silence the good doctor once and for all at the same time."

Bergy was forced to admit that point with a terse nod. "Strathmore was a G.P., so he wasn't required to keep a second set of files. He appears to have done surgeries at a dozen or more hospitals in Southern California. Yeah, it's clearing up a little. Graffmeyer insured a client, sent him or her to Strathmore for a routine physical examination. When the test results came back to Strathmore,

something in them made the client uninsurable. Ergo, the client becomes angered and turns them both into corpses. Or some variation of the aforementioned."

"Too bad Graffmeyer was an independent agent," said Forrester. "His clients are scattered to the four winds, and there's no single parent company where one of Strathmore's physical exam patients might pop up as one of Graffmeyer's insureds."

"You're telling me, in other words, that I have a tough job," said Bergy.

"In other words," Forrester said.

It appeared now that what had begun as a routine murder case was a double-murder whose designer had masterfully cut all the ties and burned all the bridges connecting him to Graffmeyer and Strathmore. Bergy would in all likelihood go to his grave with a double killing remaining on the books as unsolved, a legacy his successors would also bear down into the dim corridors of the future.

Forrester didn't really have better things to do with his time, just the tableful of tepid mystery novels to review. But he had done about as much as he could do to inquire about the violent death of a kindly dead man he had once known.

He returned to the Sea-Palms Motor Court. The stack of

mysteries loomed like a cursed mountain before an amateur mountaineer. Endorsement money loomed before him as well, each vying for his supreme attention. His phone rang, and the decision was deferred.

"Mr. Forrester?"

"Speaking."

"You don't know me."

"Obviously," said Forrester. "I don't recognize your voice, and I make it a habit not to forget them."

"Then you'll not forget mine. That's good. No wasted motion should I have to call you again."

"No wasted motion over *what*?" Forrester said.

"You live at the Sea-Palms Motel in Santa Barbara," the oblivious voice moved on. "You have an ex-wife and two sons living in Altadena on Lake Avenue. You were at one time a police reporter for the *Herald Examiner*, but presently you make a living by reviewing mystery novels and writing book endorsements for whatever meager income they bring."

"You're Ralph Edwards and this is my life," Forrester said.

"Who I am remains my business alone. And in a way yes, it is your life."

"You've lost me."

"Then let me explain in greater depth, Mr. Forrester. It's come to my attention that you've developed an unnatural curiosity over the recent death of two local men, one

an insurance agent and the other a physician."

"Afraid I don't keep up as much as I should with the local news."

"We'll dispense with the lame attempts at humor, Mr. Forrester. I'll get directly to the point of my call. You're being told to step back several paces from the investigation of the two aforementioned deaths."

"Indeed. And just who's doing the telling?"

"I am, Mr. Forrester."

"And who are you?"

"There you go again, Mr. Forrester. Circuitous conversation. Let's approach it this way. I'm sure there were times in your past as a screen writer when you moved with an idea against your better judgment, kept doggedly at it when every sane instinct told you to give it up and move on to fresher, more fruitful literary pastures."

Forrester never cared for being talked about in the past tense. Sure, his undertaker would be allowed that license, and anyone foolhardy enough to eulogize him at his burial. But that covered all the contingencies. This nameless cretin was calling him a hasbeen screen writer; Forrester allowed only his agent and a handful of script "editors to backhand his cheek with those words. And his ex-wife. Forrester, in the fact of a slur of that type, just decided to become dogged.

"I've considered what you've

said and you'll forgive me, but I am not swayed."

"A pity, Mr. Forrester. I have considerable at stake in this affair and I am prepared to remove any obstacle in my path."

"It's been nice chatting with you," Forrester said and put up the phone. He detested long-drawn-out goodbyes.

FORRESTER wasn't certain how far, down the road he would be willing to walk for the sake of a dead insurance agent. Actually he hadn't known John Graffmeyer that long or that well. He felt no strong sense of vengeance on Graffmeyer's behalf. And yet he felt drawn toward an inner circle of the dead man's private life, if simply on the strength of the fact that a man who had done no apparent harm to anyone had been ruthlessly murdered because he knew too much or was an obstacle standing flush in the path of someone else's plan. Yes, that was the reason Forrester felt a kinship with John Graffmeyer: if it could happen to a man like Graffmeyer, then it could happen to any innocent, honorable human being for no larger reason than that they were "in the way." And that heartless principle held true for Forrester as well.

Thus committed at heart to see this puzzle through to its conclusion, what did Forrester know about his anonymous caller that made him a bona fide obstacle? At this point, Forrester felt he knew

no more than Lieutenant Bergy. His anonymous intimidator had taken out some manner of insurance policy through John Graffmeyer with some as yet unidentified insurance firm. Likely it had been a policy on his life, since it appeared Graffmeyer had routinely sent him to Dr. Warren Strathmore at his office/home in Mission Canyon for a physical examination.

Forrester kept on with his theorizing. Strathmore must have approved the insured for coverage, else the matter would have ended then and there, sending the anonymous caller off in search of a less demanding insurance agent or another physician who could turn out a favorable report on the man's physical health.

No, Forrester was inclined to think Dr. Strathmore's medical examination had favored the potential client. The cursory examination might or might not have been followed up with a more detailed clinical report: but it was likely that Strathmore sent the man back to John Graffmeyer with a fairly clean bill of health.

Then something in the three-way arrangement went afoul. But what? Had it stemmed from the man's physical examination? Yes, very possibly that had been the cornerstone for murder. Forrester gave his theory its final, horrible addition. The stranger had contracted an illness which could cause his insurance coverage to be

cancelled. No, it would have to be an illness the man already had, one which had revealed itself in clinical tests, since Dr. Strathmore was neither equipped or trained to make any such diagnosis himself.

But which clinic? Forrester's unknown murder had swept the trail behind his killings clean. He had confiscated every last shred of evidence which would link him to John Graffmeyer, Dr. Warren Strathmore and the clinic to which the man's medical report had been sent. How many such medical clinics were there in Los Angeles County? Hundreds. And in Orange County, where lived the mass of Southern California's conservative, clinic-crazy rich? Ten times that number. Forrester needed a name linked with Dr. Strathmore for purposes of a medical examination for life insurance coverage. How many years of digging would a search of that complexity take him? Five? Ten? The remainder of his lifetime? It was an impossible task for one man to undertake. For an army of men to undertake.

But wait. Forrester began to see how coming close could possibly get him a cigar. To his anonymous killer, he was clearly a looming obstacle in the face of his thus-far perfect crimes. Forrester would be watched and followed. Left entirely unharmed and alone while he ran down blind alleys in pursuit of false leads and hunches, but the minute he began to draw

close to an explanation, the killer would show himself. In fact, now that Forrester thought more about it, the charade would not even have to be drawn *that* far. What did every Los Angeleno have in common? They drove an automobile. Walking got you exactly nowhere and a week late. If Forrester could remain observant about the makes and colors and license plate numbers of the cars he caught in his rear-view mirror or found parked near his as he made his way from wayward clinic to clinic, one particular make, color and licensed automobile would turn up in his presence more than once. Nobody ever passed or saw the same car twice in Los Angeles. Just twice. That's all the strange consistency he would need.

The next morning he got an early start, working it off tediously and by alphabetical order. The Aaron-Peters Medical Clinic in San Pedro, the Adamson Clinic in San Gabriel, the Afton-Utigard Clinic in Glendale, through sixteen A-listings flung to all four borders of Los Angeles County. His mind became a configurated spiderweb of cross-references which led nowhere. No name revealed itself in connection with either John Graffmeyer, Dr. Warren Strathmore, or both.

It was going to be a ninety-degree day. The palm trees looked tired and wilted. Streets shimmer-

ed in waves of heat mirages. He filled the tank of his car four times. Everything was thirsty.

Spun in the same web were ten thousand automobiles, vans and campers, and hung on them a cluttered jumble of license numbers to challenge the capacity of the human brain to store names and numbers. At one-thirty he found himself on the outskirts of Pasadena. He had reached the B's in the form of the Bayard Medical Clinic on Lake Avenue.

He passed a place called the Tolo Lounge, with a canvas banner hanging in dead weight on a windless afternoon beneath the neon marquee. *Air-Conditioned. Try Our Frosty Snowman. Topless 24 Hrs A Day.* Forrester had never been all that much of a mammary freak with the exception of his weaning years and Marilyn Monroe. But he could easily become swept up upon a tide of air-conditioning and a couple of Frosty Snowmen. He was a wringing wet dehydrated replica of his former self. He deserved both.

There was a small lot at the rear of the lounge. The asphalt, inexpertly concocted, gave like hard rubber in the heat, giving the sensation of strolling across the top of a chocolate cake. There was a rear entrance. Forrester went down a narrow, dark hallway and through a second door. The light inside the lounge increased only slightly. The place had deceptive depth, but no width to mention. On a rais-

ed platform stage to the right, a young girl gyrated in a brief, black nightgown, desperately trying to turn afternoon into sensuous night. She was only partially successful. A dozen males sat at the bar. Half had their backs turned to the girl, half were swung around to sop up the art of the dance.

Forrester slipped into a seat on the end. The girl dancing, trapped in the fog of artistry, fantasy or booze, barely noted his arrival.

The Tolo's bartender was even less observant. His first Frosty Snowman — white rum, lemon juice, extract of anise, soda and ice — didn't get into Forrester's hand for five minutes.

The man seated next to him, younger than Forrester and dressed in a business suit, told him slow service at the Tolo Lounge was a tradition.

"The guys don't care if their drinks take a minute or five years. They mostly come in to price the meat. That's why a drink is three bucks a pop. What's your line?"

Forrester said he was a screen writer who currently was working on something he hoped would be worthy of being put on a screen. And then asked the question in return, more out of protocol than any deep interest.

"I'm a repo man. Automobiles, van, semi-trucks, the works. Right at the moment, I'm after this guy's Alfa Romeo comes in here every afternoon. You'll excuse me if I have to leave in the middle of our

conversation without saying goodbye. He comes in and gets settled, I go out and wire the Alfa and bomb it back it to the bank. You gotta move fast in repo work if you want to make any bones at it."

Forrester admitted that hustling for a buck wasn't about to vanish into thin air in this century or the next.

"It isn't anything personal, repo work. Hell, it's all steel and rubber to me. Lisa comes on at two o'clock. You like baby alligators? She works with a baby alligator. I been casing this Alfa Romeo two weeks to get a line on his routine. How long he stays, how many drinks he throws down. You get to know the girls, you know?"

Forrester nodded and had a second Frosty Snowman. But not a third. They were a little too much like sucking on frozen licorice whips.

The rum helped. It was just the right amount of anesthetization against the heat. In the parking lot, some inconsiderate soul had parked his new BMW sedan less than two inches from Forrester's door on the driver's side. Why did the owners of tinker-toy foreign cars consider every whisper of space to be a parking challenge? Forrester got into his own car on the passenger side, squirmed behind the wheel and drove out of the lot mumbling a curse.

The Bayard Clinic. Forrester turned south on Lake Avenue. The distance from the B's to the Z's

seemed about as long as from Pasadena to the nearest star hung out in space. *A BMW.* Forrester wondered what a car buff would have to shell out for a sleek job like that one? Fifteen thousand? Twenty? Mercedes, Jags, Alfias, Fiats, Porsches — nobody in Los Angeles drove a normal automobile any more.

The clinic was only a handful of blocks ahead, and although Forrester's mind told him that was the most important business at hand, a secondary thought began vying for supremacy. *That BMW.* Those dual headlights and distinctive chrome ovals set in the center of its grille. The thought persisted, pounded on the wall of his brain like an urgent messenger banging down Forrester's front door. *112-POP.* Damn, he'd seen that BMW before! That morning! Where? Where?

Yes! It had been parked on Mission Drive near the Adamson Clinic in San Gabriel. It had been stationed too far down the block for Forrester to get a good look at the man who sat behind its wheel, but there wasn't any mistake about the letters of its license plate. *POP.* And now, it had turned up in the lot behind the Tolo Lounge.

Then why hadn't the killer confronted him? No, not in a public place where a dozen witnesses might have recalled him speaking to Forrester. No, he wanted no public connection with Forrester.

Whatever he had in mind to do would be done in a very private setting.

It all told Forrester two very important things. First it told him John Graffmeyer's murderer wasn't aware Forrester had identified him. Second, and far more importantly, the fact that he was now nipping at Forrester's heels gave every indication Forrest was getting warm. He glanced into the rear-view mirror. There it was, back in traffic, hiding behind larger sedans and commercial trucks and a postal van.

The Bayard Clinic loomed on Forrester's right, a two-story cream-colored building, a circa 1940 circle of stucco that once might have been home to Loretta Young or Veronica Lake. Forrester turned in at the entrance. The BMW passed by, an act which gave Forrester little comfort. He wouldn't be found far away.

A woman at the reception desk greeted Forrester politely in quiet tones. In answer to his question, she informed him Medical Records could be found down a hallway in Room 102.

The clerk in Room 102 was young, pretty and possessed of wide, innocent-looking eyes. Forrester preferred that over the thirty-year-old wily buzzard type.

"May I help you, sir?"

"Yes, I think you may be able to," Forrester told her. "I'm Dr. Straub from the Afton-Utigard Clinic in Glendale."

The young girl looked properly awed. "Yes, Dr. Straub. What can I do for you?"

"I'm interested in some secondary clinical reports on patients sent to you by Dr. Warren Strathmore of Mission Canyon. Physical examination reports pertaining to life insurance prospects."

"Dr. Warren Strathmore, did you say, doctor?"

"Yes."

"I'll check our data bank. The computer is in the other room. Shouldn't take but a minute or two."

"Thank you, nurse."

Forrester's wait was short, but fruitless.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Straub, but we show no record of a Dr. Strathmore ever having sent patients here to Adamson."

"I see," Forrester said. He wasn't abysmally crestfallen. By now he had programmed himself for failures, had resigned himself to the monotonous routine that demanded working off. Option two was at hand.

"Just one more question. I'd like you to check for any patients sent to you in connection with an insurance agent name John Graffmeyer."

"Yes, we file data to include insurance agents who are involved in clinical examinations as potential insureds. One minute and I'll feed his name and see what pops out."

Forrester spent a third of a filter-tip cigarette, submerging his guilt. There were signs all over the place warning against smoking.

"Yes, Dr. Straub, we do have some information on a John Graffmeyer. We have him down as an independent agent who offices are in Santa Barbara."

"And do you show his address as 1213 Escallonia Court?"

"Yes, Dr. Straub. We have his residence and his offices at the same Escallonia Court address."

Now there would be a third question against his promise of issuing only two. But he was on to something here. His forehead began to heat and perspiration began filtering through the pores of his palms, his neck, his forehead. Not that he was building his hopes into castles. A clerk had failed to input data on Dr. Strathmore's connection with John Graffmeyer and it was now turning up as data on Graffmeyer's read-out. Close but no Havana panatella. But it had been fun drawing this close nonetheless.

He asked his dead-end question and prepared himself again to meet a solid brick wall. But there was still that slim possibility Forrester wasn't giving up until it was snatched from him.

"What do you show as patients sent here to the clinic by Mr. Graffmeyer?"

"Just one. A Mrs. Andrea Stevens."

But a *man* had been following Forrester. And a *man* had put through the threatening phone call warning Forrester to clear out of harm's way or risk the chance of becoming a third murder victim.

"And the physician you show in connection with the physical examination of Mrs. Stevens," said Forrester. "Warren Strathmore?"

"No, Dr. Straub. The administering physician happens to be one of our own clinical specialists, Dr. Henson Osbourne."

"Is Dr. Osbourne in today?"

"Why no, Dr. Straub. He's been on vacation for over three weeks now. We don't expect him back until the beginning of next month."

"I know this is out of the ordinary," Forrester risked, "but can you give me Dr. Osbourne's home address? I wouldn't ask, except for extraordinary circumstances involving a serious medical matter." Nice touch. Straight-faced, polite but firm, restrained authority and power. Hell, kick screen writing squarely in the butt, he should have been an actor.

"I see no harm in it, Dr. Straub. His residence is listed as 3404 Oakcrest Boulevard in Downey. Do you know that area well?"

Forrester shook his head.

"It's in southwest Downey, less than four blocks from Compton. Take the Long Beach Freeway south. There's an Oakcrest Boulevard exit."

"I'm very appreciative, nurse, thank you. About Dr. Osbourne."

"Yes?"

"He's a general surgeon, A G.P., is that correct?"

The young girl gave Forrester a quizzical look, perhaps out of surprise that Forrester was a bit behind the times or was using his medical journals as carpet for a bird cage.

"No, Dr. Osbourne is a specialist," the nurse told him. "A cancer specialist."

FORRESTER didn't see the BMW as he left the clinic's lot and swung north on Lake Avenue, and that puzzled him slightly. From dogged pursuit to sudden avoidance. Forrester wasn't making any useful sense out of any of this, except that he now knew the insured was not a man, but a woman, a Mrs. Andrea Stevens. Damn! He'd neglected to ask for an address on the woman; but then in all likelihood that bit of information would have been denied him by virtue of the fact that he was not the woman's personal physician. Hell, he wasn't even a physician in the first place. No harm done. He'd run his string out at the Adamson Clinic down to threads anyway, and for that he was properly thankful.

In South San Gabriel, he swung into a service station. An attendant told him the quickest route to Downey was to connect with the San Bernardino Freeway west and

then score the Long Beach Free-way south. Connect, score. The attendant was a stringy-haired hippie trying to hang onto a generation buried in the 60s. If you couldn't verbalize it in drug-terms as a fading hippie, there was probably no conversation at all worth holding. Forrester filled his tank for a fifth time and thanked the kid, telling him he appreciated the hit of information and hoped his stashes were all big ones.

The BMW was still conspicuously absent in his rear-view mirror. Some more urgent mission had put him off Forrester's trail for the moment. The house in Downey loomed darkly in Forrester's mind. An ominous magnet, Forrester was convinced beyond any doubt it was the place to which his follower had been drawn, the home of Dr. Henson Osbourne, a man who now figured deeply in these strange killings.

Forrester was rapidly approaching the juncture where this entire puzzle would have to be passed into Lieutenant Bergy's hands, else Forrester should join the cops and pass his shabby bungalow at the Sea-Palms into Bergy's purview, along with his job of dust-jacket fiction. And Forrester didn't believe he'd take much pleasure from being chased by people with guns.

Symbolically, that juncture told Forrester it was at hand when he came to the San Bernardino cloverleaf which unwrapped itself

both north and south. From a pay telephone at another service station he placed a long distance call to Santa Barbara, only to learn that Bergy had not been into the department all day. Forrester gave his name and asked for Bergy's home telephone number.

"Sorry, Mr. Forrester, Can't give that information out," said the detective.

"But Lieutenant Bergy must have mentioned me."

"Can't recall that he ever has, Mr. Forrester."

That hurt a little. Forrester had thought his name would be a household word at the S.B.P.D. by now by virtue of his amateur meddling. He'd have to speak to Bergy about that. "Mr. Forrester, perhaps if you gave me some idea of what it's about," the detective said.

Dutifully and at length, Forrester went meticulously through the chain of events, beginning with the death of John Graffmeyer, which had led him to the remarkable news he had uncovered at the Bayard Clinic in Pasadena and to the house in Downey.

When he'd finished, it seemed no clearer to the detective than when Forrester had begun. "Well, Mr. Forrester, aside from knowing these two killings belong to Bergy, I don't know what to advise you, except to steer clear of this Dr. Osbourne's house until Lieutenant Bergy can get down there. Is there someplace down there in Los An-

geles where he can meet you?"

Forrester scanned the massive intersection of the cloverleaf through the glassed wall of his phone booth.

"There's a really chic-looking eatery at the intersection of the San Bernardino and Long Beach Freeways called the Pancake Kingdom. Terrific ambience. Pink and gold, built like a medieval castle."

"San Bernardino and Long Beach Freeways, got it. I'll try and run down Bergy and fill him in on all this."

Forrester thanked him, gave the detective Osbourne's address on Oakcrest Boulevard in Downey, and put up the phone.

The Pancake Kingdom wasn't a bad place to wolf down a stack of buckwheats if you could overlook the waitresses in their black knit hose and brief-skirted wench dresses and the cooks in their gold cardboard crowns. Forrester ordered strawberry hotcakes and some link sausage and checked his watch. It read two-thirty. If Bergy was reached right away, his wait wouldn't be very long. Santa Barbara was less than an hour's drive away by freeway.

But an hour later, with Forrester's plate bereft of everything but strawberry juice and a third cup of coffee downed to its thinnest dregs, Lieutenant Bergy still hadn't walked through the front door. One part of Forrester's brain

warned him to stay put, its teasing opposite asking him what would it hurt to make a drive-past of the house in Downey? Was it a brooding Victorian set back from the boulevard hidden in vines and secrets? A doctor's penthouse apartment, with a set of files to the ceiling, jammed with data of a thousand scams? Hell, Bergy probably hadn't even fielded Forrester's message yet. Forrester knew how he fancied his elongated lunches. Downey was only a scant fifteen minutes from the interchange. Hell, what could a little peek at the place hurt?

The Long Beach Freeway, like the others in this cluttered network of stone, was a twenty-four-a-day clog and Forrester inched down it with the rest. Twenty minutes later he was driving off onto Firestone Boulevard. Oakcrest Boulevard was in South Downey, an undulating drive of more cypress and weeping willows than palms, as though the man whose brainstorm it had been to bring the palms over from Hawaii in the first place had began to run out, necessitating sneaky substitutions.

As Forrester came up on the 3400 block of Oakcrest, he slowed perceptibly. For blocks he had been aware he had invaded an open compound of the seclusive rich, where rows of hedges rose to the heights of the tallest humans before sturdy iron fencing and signs warning that guard dogs

were perfectly capable and eager to deal with any intruders.

When he came to the spot in the 3400 block where 3404 should have been located, Forrester saw nothing but forbidding hedges and willows. There were only two openings in the thick bushes, one where an eight-foot iron gate blocked passage of pedestrians, the other the same height and ten feet in width fitted with a double gate to restrain motor traffic. Forrester saw no padlocks. Likely they were worked from inside the unseen house electrically.

Oakcrest Boulevard was quiet on this workday afternoon. Forrester saw only an occasional automobile parked out on the street, none of them the BMW. He drew to the curb fifty feet down the block from 3404 and parked. It was an odd street: Forrester heard no dogs barking, no children's voices, no television sets blaring soap operas. In Los Angeles, anyone without a television set was immediately suspected as nothing short of subversive. Yes, very odd.

Forrester walked back up Oakcrest, observing the iron fencing. There was no tangle of barbed wired atop it, no electrification; and yet, the thick hedges and the fence spoke of something very prohibitive about it, something unnaturally secretive about the man who lived within this fence and this hedging, something more

than the mere protectiveness of possessions and property. Forrester didn't like the feeling he was getting from it all, didn't like it one bit.

He went past the entry gate to the driveway gate. The drive curled quickly out of sight. The gate was affixed with the ubiquitous *Beware of Dog* sign. Forrester wondered if there wasn't a BMW parked around that bend of concrete.

Forrester was still gazing through the wrought iron of the double gates when he felt the rude jab at the small of his back. It felt hard, steely and cylindrical, ruling out an index finger, a banana and every other known object except a pistol's barrel.

"Don't turn around, Mr. Forrester, and don't make any sudden moves," said the voice at his back.

"Your voice sounds awfully familiar," said Forrester. "Have we ever met before across a telephone line?"

"There's a strong possibility."

"Mr. Stevens, isn't it?"

"You ask too many questions, Mr. Forrester."

"Best way I know to get answers."

"And get yourself dead."

Forrester saw a hand snake out and depress a pearl button set in a section of gateworks four times. The gate began to hum electrically and its halves swung back.

"Just follow the entry drive, Mr. Forrester. Bruno and Brutus are chained inside the house, but this is a magnum pistol."

"Charming."

The doctor apparently liked not only dogs, houses secured and secluded behind fences and hedges and acquaintances with huge pistols, he also liked jungle plants to an obsessive degree. Both sides of the entry drive flourished with them, a tangle of green snakes looking unruly, prodigious growers and faintly carnivorous. California. There was utterly no place else quite like it on earth. Turnips. California didn't need screenwriters to entertain anybody down here with contrived fantasies; the real thing was leaps and bounds ahead of the best professional dreamers in the business.

At the nadir of the circular drive stood the BMW along side a black Continental.

"No other guests but me?" Forrester said.

"That's right. Just the host, his assistant and you, Forrester."

"Will there be snacks and dip?"

"Just open the door and go through," Stevens said. Forrester distrusted humorless people. They always seemed to be holding a bit of bad news in abeyance to toss into the face of your next attempt at levity. They were absolutely no fun at all.

Forrester felt as though he'd just been ushered into church. This Osbourne apparently was as

quiet and private a man as his house and grounds intimated he was.

"Down the main hallway, Mr. Forrester. Second door on your left."

FORRESTER hadn't seen sliding oak doors in years, though his mind couldn't linger long on ancient artifacts and nostalgia in carpentry. Through these doors, he sensed, would be the final summing, begrudging congratulations for Forrester for having discovered the network of some unholy conspiracy, and finally the saying of goodbyes. Neither of these men would allow Forrester to remain alive, even with as little as he knew up to now. He had, after all, connected all the participants, and from there it was merely a question of time before their past acts and future intentions became clear. No, Forrester wasn't kidding himself now; this was a one-way trip to Downey for him. He'd meddled a little too much and a bit too well. And his meddling was going to get him killed.

"Well, Forrester? What are you waiting for? An invitation?"

"I wonder, can't this be discussed right here in the hall? I mean, I really see no need to involve a third party in this."

"Inside, Forrester."

"Right."

The room was a study and well-appointed if your tastes ran to

museums and shops specializing in the art of taxidermy. Behind a mahogany desk sat a heavy-set man in his fifties. He wore dark glasses and was speaking on the phone. ". . . around to the clinic, next Thursday at two p.m., Mrs. Warren. And I don't think I need overemphasize the importance of your husband's medication. Yes, you understand that, good. You see, it's very crucial that your husband appear in good health when he comes into the clinic. Fine," Mrs. Warren. I'll see you on Thursday. Goodbye."

Forrester couldn't read the expression in Osbourne's eyes behind the dark glasses, but the man's lips seemed to firm up grimly when he put up the phone.

"Ah, yes. Our Mr. Forrester from Santa Barbara. Please take a seat, Mr. Forrester."

"I think I'll stand, if it's all the same to you, Dr. Osbourne."

"Suit yourself, Mr. Forrester," said Osbourne. "You've stumbled onto the enemy's camp, but that's no reason for the enemy to forget to be gracious."

Forrester's legs were already growing rubbery. He felt this might take a while. He sat down in a chair set next to Osbourne's desk. There was no reason to deal himself more pain merely for effect.

"What do you know about us so far?" Dr. Osbourne began.

"More than the police, but less than you think," said Forrester.

"For starters, I'm fairly certain either you or Mr. Stevens here — or the both of you together — killed John Graffmeyer and Dr. Strathmore in Santa Barbara."

"Motive?"

"Not entirely sure about that part of this little charade," Forrester told Osbourne. "But I have a theory running around in my head."

Osbourne lit a thin, brown cigar. "Tell us about your theory."

"It goes something like this," Forrester said. "Mr. Stevens here went to John Graffmeyer in search of some life insurance for his wife, Andrea. Graffmeyer, as the agent, scouted around until he came up with the kind of coverage Mr. Stevens wanted. Routinely, he then sent Mrs. Stevens to Dr. Warren Strathmore for the health examination required by the carrier before the policy could go into force. How am I theorizing so far, Osbourne?"

The dark glasses dipped in a barely perceptible nod. "Very nice, Mr. Forrester, for a scenarist. Please continue."

"Stevens may or may not have known his wife had cancer," Forrester continued. "That's academic, since Dr. Strathmore's examination probably turned it up. He sent copies of the examination results back to Graffmeyer, indicating the status of Andrea Stevens' health and that because of that status, she should be disqualified from coverage. There's

every chance Graffmeyer followed through with Dr. Strathmore's suggestion. I knew John Graffmeyer. He was an honest insurance agent and a person not likely to get himself involved in medical and insurance fraud."

"I knew he was onto us when he started sniffing around Graffmeyer's apartment," said Stevens.

"Shut up, Stevens," shot Osbourne.

"I'm not certain how Stevens was led to you, Dr. Osbourne," Forrester went on. "Maybe the luck of the draw, maybe through some sort of grapevine or other."

"We contacted *him*," said Dr. Osbourne, "but I'm amazed at your suppositional abilities nonetheless. Go on."

"You either listened to his story or examined his wife as a matter of medical routine. The fatal cancer turned up and the fancy footwork began. Osbourne, it was your job to falsify the results of the physical examination, while Stevens cast around for a new insurance agent."

"No," said Dr. Osbourne, "the company has its own insuring network."

"The company?" said Forrester.

"Company, syndicate. I think you know what I mean. But go on with the scenario, Mr. Forrester. You're doing just fine."

"Then that leaves Mr. Stevens with nothing to do," said For-

rester. "We can't have that. Stevens, I guess that leaves you with the job of killing John Graffmeyer and Dr. Strathmore and cleaning their respective files of any references to yourself and your wife. You transported Graffmeyer's body down to the ocean and dumped him over the breakwater, then paid a visit to Dr. Strathmore's house in Mission Canyon to take care of the final witness."

"Don't see no reason to put it off now," came Stevens' voice behind Forrester, dropping a decibel to indicate quiet resolution. "I can take care of his body just like I did with the insurance agent. I know places around Santa Barbara, lots of them, where a body won't be found for years."

"No, Mr. Stevens, an accident, I think. Murders in a string tend to tie themselves together. Thus far, the Santa Barbara police are frustrated with two seemingly unrelated killings, but let us not press our luck to its limits."

"Whatever you say, Dr. Osbourne," said Stevens meekly, just a mere hatchet man now, a man with a dying wife whose demise would turn him a comfortable profit in the insurance settlement, with the bulk of it, of course, going into the pockets of Osbourne and the syndicate.

"So you've managed to set up a nifty little network of life insurance companies," said Forrester. "Terminal patients are identi-

fied and sought out, the way car thieves seek out owners who are just a smidgeon delinquent in their payments and rip off the automobiles before the bank turns up to claim them. The car owner recoups his loss through the insurance and the thieves have a spanking new piece of steel. In your scam, Osbourne, the syndicate claims a lion's share of the life insurance settlement in exchange for a set of phony medical records, and the big losers are the honest holders of life insurance policies. Have I tied it all up neatly enough?"

"You've come full circle, Mr. Forrester. And frankly, this would make a damn good little screenplay. It possesses all the elements. The respected physician with an evil secret life, the dogged, hasbeen movie writer filling his fruitless days hounding the trail of an astounding possibility. Their ultimate confrontation at a fortress house in Downey. Unfortunately, Mr. Forrester, we can't ever let his story be shown upon a motion picture screen."

"Doesn't bother me," said Forrester. "I always wait for the book to come out anyway."

"You can maintain your sense of humor — that's commendable."

Forrester threw off a wry smile. "Have to," he told Osbourne. "Humor is about all I've got left."

Osbourne stubbed out his cigar. "We'll be putting you up here a few days, Mr. Forrester, until we can work out the details of your accident or your suicide. The latter would be less suspicious, I think. You will be shown to be highly despondent over the fading fortunes of your career. While younger men pluck off those rich, teleplay plums, you are left with the despoiled fruits of critical reviews, book endorsements and the shame and grief which accompany those pedestrian assignments. The *Los Angeles Times* will honor your life with a fine obituary — we'll see to that if we can. Your wife and children deserve no less."

"I'll bring his car into the compound until we can decide what to do about it," said Stevens. "Your car keys, Mr. Forrester?"

Forrester handed them over. Stevens gave Dr. Osbourne the pistol and left the room. Forrester made a swift review of his life, flashing pleasant memories across his brain: growing up, schools, boyhood chums, his first date, his first kiss, his first love, his deflowering at fifteen in the back seat of a DeSoto at a drive-in theater in El Monte, the early years of his successes in film-writing, the pleasant and charming characters by which his later years had been brushed, the off-beat and outre people who were specimens to occupy his thoughts.

His life insurance was paid up, his last will and testament safely kept in a bank safe deposit box in Santa Barbara, his debts not insurmountable obstacles for his heirs. It had been a good life, filled with more salad days than with days of problems and pain. On balance, he was glad to have been alive and not a bit sorry to die now that he truly thought about it. A noble death, on the trail of crooks and killers, wasn't such a bad way to check out.

"You look in deep thought, Mr. Forrester."

"Ordering my life."

Osbourne smiled knowingly. "Ah, yes. The instant replay, so to speak."

Two more minutes passed. Forrester declined a cigarette, a hazard to his health. The oak doors slid back. Stevens stood in the doorway and said. "Dr. Osbourne? Could you step out here a moment? We have a little bit of a problem."

"A problem?" said Osborne, his dark glasses rising slightly in response to the lifting of his eyebrows, from a man not at all used to problems.

"Yes, sir."

"Excuse me, Mr. Forrester."

The wait wasn't interminable. Forrester heard a disturbance in the hallway, made minor by the closed oak doors, reminding him how kings loved to make their castle walls thick to discourage

eavesdropping and cut down on rumors of family squabbling and infighting for the crown. Forrester was glad not to have been brought up in this house as a child; he wouldn't have learned one damned juicy bit of familial gossip or a single unguarded secret.

Presently, the oak doors rolled open. Forrester expected the reappearance of Dr. Osbourne and his faithful gopher. What he saw was Lieutenant Bergy, entering in the escort of two uniforms with drawn pistols.

"You okay, Forrester?"

"As compared to what?" Forrester said.

"As compared to dead."

"Oh well, if that's the comparison, I feel like a million dollars before inflation. How'd you manage to storm the fortress?"

"Well, I got the address from one of my sergeants who called me at home. You weren't anywhere to be seen at the Pancake Kingdom, so I simply deduced you were off and meddling again and came straight on down to Downey."

"How'd you get inside?"

"Spotted your car out front when I got here and rang up a couple of black-and-whites. As for getting inside, I was about to make a decision on two admittedly foolhardy options. Option One had me squeezing through the fencing, which would have left half of me behind. And Option Two had me climbing out on a

limb of one of those willows and dropping down inside, which would have left *all of me* behind with a couple of broken legs and compound fractures of the arms."

"Both; however, gain you sympathy," said Forrester.

"But no arrests. Fortunately, that quandary coincided with our confrontation with a stranger's attempt to climb in behind the wheel of your car. There was enough hem-and-haw in his explanation of that act to make us seriously doubt his veracity. Ergo, we prevailed upon him to take us to his leader, this Dr. Osbourne you were so concerned about."

"There was really no need," said Forrester. "I could have managed this whole tawdry affair myself."

Bergy's eyes, at that remark, rolled two complete revolutions in their sockets. "You and what National Guard battalion, Forrester? So, what have we stumbled upon here?"

"Not a helluva lot," Forrester told him. "A double murderer, that's Stevens. And a physician who's tied in with a syndicate network involved in kickbacks from the insuring of terminally ill Los Angelenos. Throw in the kidnapping of a disfavored son, if you think you need any icing."

"That's Osbourne."

"You got it," said Forrester, and extended himself the luxury of a cigarette, averting his eyes from the package warning.

Outside, Pasadena smelled of a warm dusk and flowers. Forrester stood at the curb with Lieutenant Bergy as they bid goodbye to Stevens and Dr. Osbourne as they were shuttled off downtown in one of the black-and-whites. Bergy turned to Forrester.

"You may have the comeback book here, Forrester. The great Santa Barbara mystery. It offers tremendous potentialities, don't you think?"

Forrester thought it over. The copyright hassles; the confrontation with lawyers; the tedium of jail visits; the notetaking and tape recording; the seeking out of relatives, witnesses and attendant minor principals; the loneliness of months of writing and then the followup of the court trials and the mountain of transcripts they would produce; then the appeals and the mountains of transcripts *they* would produce. Forrester saw no real end to it.

"Bergy," he answered finally, when the entire range of implications settled in his mind, "I think I'll leave it all to younger men. Besides, I just don't see it as a vehicle with much story potential as a big-grosser."

"You don't," said Bergy.

"Nope," said Forrester as he watched a beautiful sun make its dying dive at the far horizon. "It's far too far from being kinky enough, which is to indicate it lacks turnip-worship quality."

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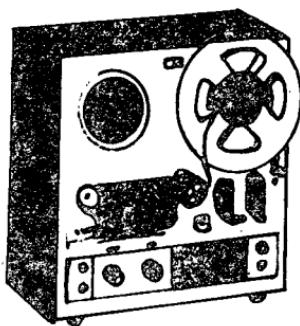
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# Ambush In Bangkok



by MIKE TAYLOR

Phil and Mike Had Been Flying Buddies in Vietnam — but a Lot of Water Had Flowed under a Lot of Bridges in the Ten Years Since.

I WAS SITTING at a table in the Cat's Eye Bar on the first floor of the President Hotel in downtown Bangkok, sipping an Amarit and watching three blond SAS stewardesses watch me. One thought she recognized me; her friends weren't so sure. They argued casually over it, glancing curiously in my direction.

The one who thought she knew me was probably right. An article with accompanying photograph, snapped using a telephoto lens and blown up until it looked like I was underwater, had appeared in the airline's courtesy magazine several months earlier. My name

is Michael Grim. I make my living protecting rich businessmen against terrorists.

Outside it was midafternoon and traffic was a hopeless snarl. The temperature on the streets would be pushing a hundred degrees, with the humidity not far behind. In here it was cool, dark and quiet. I swallowed the last of my beer and was ordering another when the man I was waiting for came into the bar.

It had been ten years since Phil Marsh and I had flown Cobra gunships together out of Danang. Short hair had grown fashionably long, jungle fatigues had been re-

placed by tropical business suits, but we recognized one another immediately.

He came across to the table, half trotting, a funny smile on one side of his face. "Mike! You old s.o.b. Good to see you."

"Hello, Phil." I met his powerful grip and for a few seconds we tested each other. "Sit down and quit trying to break my hand."

He grinned and relaxed. "Sure, partner. Waiter! Another beer here." He was a big man, an inch or two taller than me and a good thirty pounds heavier. Wavy blond hair starting to recede. A dark tropical tan that still couldn't hide a tracery of broken veins on his nose and cheekbones. He'd always been hell on a bottle.

Phil dragged back a chair and sprawled out his legs. His forehead was beaded with sweat and there were dark stains around the shoulder seams of his bush-cut jacket. He knocked back half his beer in a long swallow.

"Whew! Man, you look great. You haven't aged a day since they loaded you on that med evac chopper at Quang Tri."

"Clean living," I said, lighting a cigarette. "Since then I've given up taking risks."

He laughed. "Sure. And I'm a Buddhist monk. Hey, what're the odds of both of us winding up in the same line of work? Course I'm only a local talent. You, now, you're a worldwide success. A celebrity even."

I shrugged. "Sign of the times. Twenty years ago I'd have starved to death. But let's not trot out the modest act. I understand you're pretty highly regarded in this town."

He shrugged back. "I've built up a fair little business since I left Uncle Sam's finest. Industrial work mostly. Supplying guards, watchmen, an occasional body-guard job. And I've made a few friends in high places. Another beer?"

"No, thanks. Let's skip the fond reminiscences for now, Phil. What's the situation?"

He stopped smiling. "We've got troubles, friend."

"I thought we might. I warned the boss there was too much publicity on this trip. Who is it?"

"Ever hear of a man called Chan Li?"

I said I hadn't.

"He's one of the biggest of the independent exporters, rumored to be a go-between for certain un-sanctioned rice shipments to the Red Chinese. He's also into opium. Powerful and ruthless. He sees this upcoming trade agreement between NORAMCO and the government as a move to cut him out of the picture."

"You mean if Orin Treloew gets first rights to those agricultural exports it puts a crimp in his business."

"A big one. This is a small country. Its food exports are limited. If Chan Li was fronting for the

Reds, you can bet he was getting a hell of a kickback. Plus they were probably helping with the opium distribution. It could ruin his business if all the rice starts going somewhere else."

"Makes sense. What've you found out?"

"Nothing definite yet, but there are rumblings. I've set up a listening post near his home. Why don't you come with me and take a look at him? Get a feel for things."

"All right, if it won't take too long. Orin Trelow is due in on Pan Am 002 this evening."

"Have you back in a couple of hours. C'mon, partner. It's good to be working together again."

I drank up and we left. One of the stewardesses waved tentatively at me.

Outside the sun was blinding and the air felt like a hot, wet blanket. As we came down the broad steps of the hotel, a man detached himself from the sidewalk crap game alongside a line of parked cabs and ambled over to intercept us.

"Where you go, boss?"

It was my personal cab driver, self-appointed, who had picked me up at the airport the night before and since ferried me around the city. He was a good-humored character, big for a Thai, Broad-shouldered and swag-bellied. A gold front tooth gleamed when he smiled, which was constantly. His name was Sumong — he assured

me it meant "Brains" in his native tongue. He piloted an ancient yellow Datsun as though he had been personally assured by Buddha that he would somehow reach a ripe old age.

"My friend has a car," I said. "I'll be going with him."

His face fell and the gold tooth was eclipsed. "You sure, boss? Air conditioner all fixed now."

"It's okay. Take the rest of the afternoon off. I'll see you later on this evening."

He frowned at Phil as if he thought I was being kidnapped. "Okay. I wait here."

We got into a silver-gray Mercedes convertible with right-hand drive and Phil bullied his way out into the endless flow of traffic. He drove down Sukumvit Road, whose bars I dimly recalled from my frantic R&R days, until we were well into the outskirts of the city. One side of the street was rice paddies; small shops lined the other.

He wheeled the Mercedes into a narrow alley alongside a three-story building and we got out. The first two floors were occupied by a tailor shop doing a thriving business. The third was Phil's listening post.

Two hard-looking men glanced around as Phil keyed the door and let us in. One was at a tripod-mounted telescope; his partner had on headphones and was monitoring a stack of expensive-looking electronics.

Phil grinned. "Take a look, partner."

I walked over to the jalousied window. Across a wide, scum-coated *klong* behind the shop stood a walled white British colonial mansion. The grounds looked cool and inviting; tennis courts, sprinklers whirling rainbows over thick green grass, an olympic-size pool.

"Chan Li lives pretty well," Phil said. "That's him by the pool, just to the left of the diving board."

"Can I use the glass?"

"Sure." He said something in fluent Thai and the man at the telescope stepped back and lit a cigarette. I located the exporter and brought him in close. He was lying face up on a chaise longue in the boiling sun. He managed to look both fat and hard at the same time. I guessed he was half-Chinese, half Thai. An extremely young-looking girl was rubbing oil into his brown skin.

"Hey, we've got something!" Phil said. He had been talking with his men. "This might be it. Run that tape, Noi."

The man at the recording equipment rewound half a reel of tape, then played it forward in fits and starts until he found the part he was looking for. Phil slipped on a pair of headphones and listened intently for a couple of minutes.

"Run it again," he told the sound man. He handed me the phones. "They say this was taped late this morning. It's between Li

and one of his enforcers."

I listened to the conversation. The voices were faded over the long-range mike but they spoke in distinguishable, if broken, English.

"It is all arranged?" Li asked — you can always tell the man in charge.

"Yes, Mr. Li. We have found a perfect location. It is on Rama IV highway, across from trade center. When the target leaves his car, he will be in our crossfire."

"You have handpicked the best men?"

"All four are expert marksmen, combat-tested. There will be no mistakes."

"Good. It will be tomorrow morning. He must be eliminated before trade negotiations begin."

"It will be done."

Li said something about money, but I was already slipping off the phones. Phil regarded me with raised eyebrows.

"You were right," I said. "Mr. Chan Li seems to be a man of direct action. How many contacts have you got on the police force?"

"Enough. Listen, I've got an idea. I'll tell you about it on the way back to your hotel."

A FEW NEON signs were coming to life as hazy dusk settled over the city. Phil snaked his way through jammed streets and uncontrolled traffic circles, gesturing with one hand, driving with the other.

"Look, there are two ways we

can handle this. If we cordon off the whole area and double the protection, Chan Li's men won't have a chance at Mr. Trelow — *tomorrow* — but you can bet they'll be back again. And the next time we may not have this kind of warning.

"On the other hand, I think we can pull a little stunt on Mr. Li. I've got some pretty high level contacts with the law. We could rig up a phony motorcade and send it along the planned route right on schedule. The cops can stake out the area and nail the hit guys cold. A few hours in the sweat cells and they'll be singing Li's name. Meanwhile your boss can leave a few minutes later and arrive at the trade center by a different route, safe and sound. What do you say?"

"It sounds like the best way to go. I'll have to clear it with Mr. Trelow, but I like the idea of putting Li out of business now while we know what he plans to do."

"Great. I'll take care of the arrangements and get back to you later this evening . . . What's the matter?"

"Nothing," I said abstractedly. Phil's off-side mirror was a little out of kilter and I could see the rows of traffic flowing behind us. Several cars back a battered yellow Datsun trailed in our wake. Sumong? Not likely, I told my nerves; there can't be more than a couple of thousand similar cars in the city. A few seconds later it disappeared.

Phil dropped me off in front of the President, promising to get in touch as soon as everything was set. As he drove away the same yellow Datsun pulled out from the line of parked taxis and followed him down the street. This time there was no doubt. Even in the growing dusk I could make out Sumong's profile.

I went up to my room to shower and change, wondering what the hell was going on. Was the chubby taxi driver working for Li? If so, he had the perfect setup. He had been close to me every minute since I entered the country. Things were breaking fast, too fast, and I didn't like the added complications. Worse, there was no way I could warn Phil until later — I had no idea where he was going. I cursed myself for ignoring my instincts when I first spotted the car.

Orin Trelow arrived at 7:45 in a government limo, flanked by a pair of minor officials. He looks as urbane and distinguished in person as he does on the covers of *Time* and *Business Week*. Tall, slender, silver-haired, soft-spoken — he's a senior man on the board of directors at NORAMCO, one of the larger multinationals. I brought him up to date over dinner.

"It seems like the best approach," he said when I'd outlined Phil's scheme. "We're fortunate

your friend Marsh is so well-established here. I hope he can put this Chan Li character out of business. These negotiations are going to be tough enough without worrying about wild-eyed assassins."

"It bothers me that our advance men didn't finger him as potential trouble," I said. "I'm going to have a talk with Smithers when we get back. The only candidate he came up with was that foreign minister, Phanom."

"No stirrings there?"

"Not according to Phil Marsh. I wish Smithers' men had talked to him when they were here."

Our waiter came over. "There is a man in the lobby who says he must speak with you immediately, Mr. Grim."

"That'll be from Phil. Shall I tell him it's okay?"

"Go ahead, Mike. You're calling the shots."

The messenger turned out to be the sound man from the listening post. "Mr. Marsh send me 'cause you remember. He say ask if everything go."

"Tell him yes."

"He say you tell your boss leave for trade center eight o'clock sharp. Go by Suriwongse to Ploenchit to New Road. Stay away from Rama IV and everything be fine."

"Fair enough. Listen, I'm pretty sure Mr. Marsh is being tailed." I described Sumong and his car. "I don't know who he's working for, probably Li, but warn Phil to be on the lookout for him."

He repeated the description and left. Orin Trelo and I finished dinner; then, because I was still a little woozy from jet lag, I went up to my room and stretched out on the bed.

I couldn't fall asleep. My brain kept grinding away, running film clips of the million-and-one things that could go wrong. The appearance of the sound man as a messenger bothered me. I didn't know why.

I got up, took a long, hot shower, sipped a glass of Galiano. I had just lain back down when there was a knock at the door.

"Yes?"

"Police," a man's voice said.

Now what? I opened the door. Two big guys in olive uniforms and Sam Browne belts rushed me back into the room.

"You are under arrest, Mr. Grim."

"Like hell." Government cops are notoriously high-handed, but I was certain these guys weren't your everyday lawmen.

I went after the one on my left while his partner was shutting the door. We went into a brief demonstration of the martial arts, oriental style, neither of us doing much damage. Then his friend got back into the act, kicking my feet out from under me. As I hit the floor he jammed a hypodermic gun against my upper arm. It barely stung at all.

The world took a right turn and floated peacefully away.

KEEPING STILL when I came to was the hardest thing I've ever done. I wanted to groan, hold my head, throw up — anything but just lie there and hurt.

I slitted my right eye a millimeter. The two phony cops were still there, playing cards across the desk. They had been decent enough to throw me on the bed. Daylight peeping through a crack in the window said I'd been out all night. Which meant —

I slid my head sideways till I could see the travel alarm on the nightstand. 7:45. In fifteen minutes Orin Treloow would be climbing into his limo for the ride to the trade center. And something, I wasn't sure what, had gone totally wrong. I had to get out of there, soonest.

Alongside the nightstand sat a large camera case. Besides a jumble of photographic equipment and film packs, it held a .38 police special in an inside pocket. It wasn't much of a chance, but I was out of options. Inch by inch I began shifting my body toward the edge of the bed.

I was doing fine until I hit a noisy spring. It squeaked softly, but loud enough to bring both hoods upright, staring at me. I dove for the case, but they were on me before I could get the flap open.

Just then the door exploded off its hinges.

In came Sumong like the malt liquor bull. He grabbed each of my

attackers by the collar and hurled them against opposite walls. In thirty seconds they were both on the floor out cold and he was helping me up.

"You okay, boss?"

"Yeah," I said groggily. "But if you're working for Li, why did you clobber those two?"

He looked hurt. "Sumong nobody's man. When I see you with the one called Marsh, I know you got trouble. He have my cousin beat up bad last year. So I follow."

"Phil Marsh?" Suddenly the lights came on. "Are these *his* men?"

"For sure. I hear him tell them go here but I no can get away till now."

"Good Lord!" I snatched up the phone. "Desk, please."

"Has Mr. Treloow left the hotel yet?" I asked when the girl came on the line.

"Yes, sir. He leave a few minutes ago."

"Damn! What time is it?"

"Eight-o-seven, sir."

I groaned. My clock was fifteen minutes slow. I took a couple of helpless steps before it hit me.

"Sumong! You said you've been following Marsh. Do you know where he is now?"

"You bet. I stay on his tail all night. He have his men look for me but Sumong too smart. One time I work for police. I shadow him good, boss. I —"

"That's fine," I interrupted.

"But if we don't get to him in the next few minutes, *my* boss is going to be dead. Where is he now?"

"Trocadero Hotel. Fifth floor. Room 517."

"What street is it on?"

"Suriwongse, boss. By New Road."

"Right on the route. Can we catch up with the motorcade?"

"No way. Motorcycle cops in front and behind. They no let us get close. Which way he go?"

I told him.

He slapped his belly and chortled. "I know shortcut. Car and motorcycles drive slow. We go like hell, get to hotel before motorcade. What you say?"

I grabbed the camera case and we sprinted for the door.

The next twenty minutes were a harrowing experience. Sumong drove with his horn and brakes. We weaved in and out of morning rush-hour traffic, flew around the deadly traffic circles, sent pedestrians and three-wheeled *samlars* scurrying for the sidewalks. At last we tore down an alley that bisected a teeming marketplace and wound up at the service entrance of the Trocadero.

"Get around to the street and try to stop the motorcade," I yelled as I piled out. "Crash your car and block traffic if you have to. I'll buy you a new one."

He grinned acknowledgment and burned twenty feet of rubber in reverse. I ran. Just inside the

entrance stood an open service elevator. I jumped in and hit the five button.

The door to 517 was locked. I dug out my special set of keys. It opened with the third one.

The living room beyond was empty but another door, this one slightly ajar, led to a bedroom. I pushed it open silently.

The far wall held a window which overlooked the street. Crouched in front of it was Phil Marsh. He held a 30.06 with a sniperscope, its barrel resting on the sill of the open window. Sounds of rumbling motorcycles, punctuated by an abrupt squeal of tires and angry shouts, floated up from the street below. I smiled. Sumong was in business.

I drew the .38 from my belt. "It's finished, Phil."

He tensed and the rifle started to swing away from the window. I put a bullet into the wall near his right kneecap.

"Drop the rifle. That's it. Hands on your head and turn around carefully."

He complied slowly, shaking his head as he faced me. "I should have you killed, Mike. But we go back a long way. I thought if I kept you out of the way until it was over, you'd substantiate the Chan Li story."

"It was quite a setup," I said. "You manufactured a phony listening post and faked the tape. I should have realized Chan Li wouldn't be likely to issue his

orders in English, but I thought you were working for me. The men who held me would have left something to identify them with Chan Li too, I guess."

He nodded. "How did you find me?"

"With the help of an overgrown taxi driver who's smarter than both of us. Who *are* you working for, Phil? The foreign minister?"

"You hit it. If this had worked out we'd have wiped out the trade agreement and put Chan Li on the government's blacklist at the same time."

"Yeah," I said. "And a pretty important and decent man would have been killed for somebody's moneygrubbing schemes. Let's go."

"Wait. You owe me a favor, Mike. Not just for now, but what about 'Nam? I got you out of that burning chopper."

I waited.

"You've never seen the inside of a Thai jail. A lot of prisoners, especially political ones, never make it to trial. I'm not asking you to let me go. Just let me handle it my own way."

I waited some more.

"So long, Mike. I think I hear the hotel security cops coming down the hall."

I turned around to look. Phil was right. I did owe him something.

When I turned back around he was gone. The drapes were still moving slightly, though there was no breeze.

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# Cruising

by M.J. SCHIMMEL

## Joey's Sweet Little Scam Paid off Beautifully Until He Fell Afoul of a Sucker Who Couldn't Afford It.

JOEY MEACHEM swore as he turned the ignition key for the third time. There was the sound of metal grinding, and the old Chevrolet finally turned over. The mark had gotten into his car and was almost to the exit of the parking lot when Joey threw the car into reverse and struck the big T-bird in the right front fender with his rear bumper.

Slamming the door behind him, Joey surveyed the damaged bumper, a well-practiced look of indignation on his face. The driver of the Thunderbird had stayed inside his car. Joey walked to the driver's side. Through the window, he could see the elderly man take a brown paper bag and toss it on the floor. That was a good sign.

"Why don't you watch where you're going!"

The driver of the Thunderbird rolled down his window. "You backed right into me!"

"Like hell I did! You were going

too fast for conditions, and I just paid thirty bucks to have that fender fixed, too!"

Joey always liked to set a figure up front. It gave the mark something to think about.

The white-haired man looked nervously at the traffic going by. He didn't like carrying on a conversation in front of an adult bookstore. "Look, just give me the name of your insurance company, and we'll let them settle this."

Joey decided to play his ace. "Oh, no you don't! I'm going to get a cop. I want pictures for court. You just wait here while I call. What's the name of this place anyway?"

The elderly man was perspiring freely now. He was picturing the accident report in the newspaper listing the House of Erotica as place of accident. What if his friends saw it—his wife?

"Did you say thirty dollars would cover it?"

"Better make it forty. This car's almost a classic."

Joey's "classic" registered an impressive 45 m.p.h. as he cruised down Santa Rosa Boulevard, checking the porno shops. It was time to get rid of this car. One of these days, a mark was going to call his bluff, and the few remaining cylinders were not going to get him out of there in time. Still, he couldn't complain.

He had paid a hundred and twenty bucks for the car three weeks ago, and so far he had made a little over fifteen hundred on it. Tomorrow, he'd see if Harry had a new car. Wait a minute! Tomorrow was the 12th — he had to go to the Welfare Office about his re-determination.

*Damn!* There was the whole day shot! Still, if you kept your eyes open . . . The last time, he met those two girls he sent over to Nate at the Welfare Office. There was money to be made any place if you knew how to look for it.

There was only one car in front of the House of Bondage that looked promising—a large Oldsmobile. Still, you could never be sure, with the way cars were financed these days, any riffraff could own a large car. Joey liked to see them enter, see what they were wearing, look for the nervous glances as they disappeared behind the doors with a speed that would have made Houdini envious.

Take the Thunderbird this morning. He hadn't seen the

driver, but the two fraternal emblems on the car signified the owner was an established member of the community. Joey looked over the Oldsmobile, but didn't get any vibes from it. It was almost the lunch hour. He pulled out on the highway and headed for Anita's Massage Parlor.

He took the last parking space and kept an eye on the Caddy with the doctor's license plate. He had just turned off the engine when a large conservatively dressed man wearing a hat exited and got into a Plymouth three spaces away. The Plymouth backed out with its front end in Joey's direction. Throwing the Chevy in reverse, he swung the wheel to the left and backed into the path of the on-coming car, bracing for the crash.

Unfortunately, the crash never came. What did come was the sound of tires squealing as the Plymouth pulled out of the path of Joey's oncoming vehicle. Even in his anger, Joey had to admire the way the other driver handled a car.

The large man slammed the door of the Plymouth and approached Joey's car, taking angry strides. His coat was open, and his fists were dug into each hip. On his left side, Joey could see the .38 with the shield pinned to the holster.

*Oh my God!* he thought. *It's a cop, probably a vice cop, checking out the massage parlor.*

"Why the hell don't you watch where you're going!"

Joey waved an apology. "I'm sorry—I didn't see you."

"Well, get out of here before I bust your face for you."

"Yes, sir—thank you, sir."

The old Chevy registered a miraculous 50 m.p.h. as Joey took off down the highway.



"Fifty bucks!"

"Do you know how hard it is to get parts for these cars?"

The doctor in the parking lot of the male burlesque theater handed a twenty out of the window of his car. "That's all I've got on me."

Joey grabbed the money and eased into the evening traffic on the boulevard.



It was 8:30 and so far he had made over twenty trips up and down the boulevard. He pulled in to the hamburger place across from the Swedish bookstore. Maybe he would get lucky before the shop closed.

All in all, it had not been such a bad day—the twenty bucks from the doctor had brought the take up to a hundred and fifty bucks. That business with the vice cop still had him shaking, and then there was that mess at the Sex Garden.

He had just pulled into the lot when he saw a two-year-old Granada with religious stickers all over the bumper. He hadn't

waited; He took the car out with a sideswipe to the left fender and slammed his car into park. He still had his hand on the door handle when the door of the Granada slammed, and a large heavy set man, dressed like a construction worker, came storming up to him.

"Why the hell don't you watch where you're going!"

Joey didn't like someone stealing his lines. The construction worker was mad as hell. He had just bought the car two days before. It had cost Joey twenty-five bucks. Why the hell don't people take the bumper stickers off cars, when they buy them secondhand?

Joey was about to call it a night when he saw the big Lincoln pull into the parking lot of the Swedish bookstore. He could still make one more hit tonight! A short thin man carrying a briefcase glanced nervously about him and entered the store.

*Bingo!* Guys who hid their dirty books in newspapers of briefcases were very anxious to maintain their privacy. Joey threw the remainder of his hamburger in the trash barrel and pulled into the parking lot of the bookstore.

The thin man glanced nervously about him as he exited from the store, and slid behind the wheel of the big Lincoln. He had only driven a few feet when Joey shot around the corner of the building directly in the path of the Lincoln,

swinging to the right in time to just graze the front fender.

"Why the hell don't you watch where you're going!"

The window of the Lincoln rolled down, and a gloved hand extended a fifty-dollar bill. "I'm sorry, I didn't see you coming—this should cover the damage."

Joey looked at the bill. Fifty bucks without a hassle—this guy should be good for at least a hundred!

"Do you know how much it costs for body work?" He bent down and peered into the window. "This is going to run at least a hundred."

The thin man slid from behind the wheel and stepped out. Joey got a good look at his face. When

he saw the eyes, he wished he hadn't.

The thin man stepped between Joey and the highway traffic, his briefcase in his hand. "Do you know what your trouble is, my friend? You're greedy, just like Eddy, the man who runs this store. Eddy had a lot of partners, but he liked to hold out money that was rightfully theirs. That's why I was visiting Eddy tonight. I wish you hadn't insisted on looking at my face."

Joey stared helplessly as the thin man pulled a long black object from the briefcase. First the vice cop, then the construction worker, now this! Three strikes in one day—for some reason, the number seemed appropriate!

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# Methods For Murder



by LARRY T. SHAW

In Real Life, Most Murderers Prefer Simple M.O.'s. But in Mystery Fiction, the More Complicated, the Better.

MOST REAL-LIFE murders are unpremeditated affairs, committed in fits of uncontrolled rage. The weapon, generally, is whatever is handy: butcher knife, shotgun, or the blunt base of a lamp. It is only in mystery novels that the crimes are more carefully and deviously planned and the weapons more exotic, if not downright bizarre. In evidence we cite these examples from some of our favorite Whodunits:

## 1. Poisons

The victim was poisoned by . . . concentrated nicotine on the tips of several ordinary needles projecting from a ball of cork dropped into his overcoat pocket. — *The Tragedy of X* by "Barnaby Ross" (Ellery Queen), 1932

. . . arsenic in the lobster patties. — *Zero at the Bone* by E.X. Ferrars, 1967

. . . atropine in the sherry. — *Liberty Hall*, 1941; and oxalic acid in the hangover preventative. — *With Intent to Kill*, 1958, both by A. Clutton-Brock.

. . . digitalis in a glass where it had been placed twelve years earlier. — *The Murderer Is a Fox* by Ellery Queen, 1945

. . . LSD in the town's water supply. — *The Gantry Episode* by June Drummond, 1968

. . . phenol in a dentist's needle. — *This Won't Hurt You* by Mary Fitt, 1960

. . . Poisoned chocolates. — *The Poisoned Chocolates Case* (!) by Anthony Berkeley, 1929

... a poisoned dart. — *Death in the Air* by Agatha Christie, 1935

... poison on a thermometer the victim used every day. — "The Three Widows" in *Q.B.I.* by Ellery Queen, 1955

### 2. Blunt Instruments

The victim was bashed or beaten to death with... a croquet mallet.

— *A Rush on the Ultimate* by H.R. F. Keating, 1961

... an eighteen-inch length of coaxial cable. — *A Murder of Quality* by John Le Carre, 1962

... a golf club. — *Fer-de-Lance* by Rex Stout, 1934

... a heavy Egyptian statue. — *The Scarab Murder Case* by S.S. Van Dine, 1930

... a magnum bottle of champagne. — *Death and the Joyful Woman* by Ellis Peters, 1961

... a police constable's truncheon. — *A Blunt Instrument* by Georgette Heyer, 1938

### 3. The "Exotics"

The victim was killed by... a trained swamp adder ("India's deadliest snake, whose poison is not detectable"). — "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, 1883

... a swarm of poisonous bees. — *A Taste For Honey* by H.F. Heard, 1941

... asphyxiation by a gas tap in an English hotel room. — *The Three Taps* by (Msgr.) Ronald A. Knox, 1927

... being strangled with her own necklace at a house party. — *The Deadly Truth* by Helen McCloy, 1941

... being crushed by an experimental rocket in a test ditch. — *Rocket to the Morgue* by "H.H. Holmes" (Anthony Boucher), 1942

... being stabbed in the chest with the blade of a pair of hospital scissors. — *Death of an Ad Man* by Alfred Eichler, 1954

... being dragged slowly behind a moving car. — *The Grindle Nightmare* by Quentin Patrick, 1955

... having the front of his head blown apart by a bomb disguised as a cigar in an expensive aluminum package (in the detective's own house!). — *A Family Affair* by Rex Stout, 1975

... being run over by a car and then burned in a haystack. — *Gownsman's Gallows* by Katherine Farrer, 1957

... being burned to death by a fire set off by phosphorus in a leaking water bottle. — *A Pact with Satan* by Leonard Holton, 1960

... having his heart punctured in the left ventricle by an ice pick. — *The Zebra-Striped Hearse* by Ross Macdonald, 1962

... a thirty-eight bullet shot from a cartridge in a tube wired to a microphone at which he was speaking. — *The Shattered Raven* by Edward D. Hoch, 1969

... having the front of his head blown apart by a bomb disguised as a cigar in an expensive aluminum package (in the detective's own house!). — *A Family Affair* by Rex Stout, 1975

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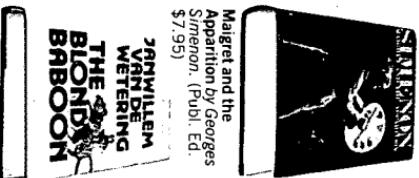
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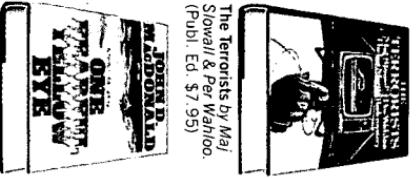
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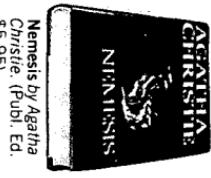
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